SALVATION
Every Man's
Great Concern.

Written originally in French
BY
René
Monsieur *RAPIN.*

Done into English.

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LONDON:
Printed by *W. O.* for *Matth. Gillyflower*, at the *Spread-Eagle* in *Westminster-hall*; and *Matth. Wotton*, at the *Three Daggers* in *Fleet-street*. 1699.

THE CONTENTS.

CHAP. I.

The deplorable Ignorance, and general Blindneſs of Mankind, in this moſt important Affair, Page 1.

CHAP. II.

The Cauſe of this ſo general Blindneſs, and Ignorance in the Buſineſs of Salvation: and What may beſt Prevent and Cure it, 22

CHAP. III.

Wherein the Mighty Importance of this Affair conſiſts, 40

CHAP. IV.

The Principal Obſtructions to this Great Work, 65

CHAP. V.

The Means of Salvation, and the Uſe we ought to make of them, 85

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

Mistakes and False Measures in the Way of Salvation, 105

CHAP. VII.

Errours to be avoided in Correcting our Errours, 136

CHAP. VIII.

That Men ought to Work out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling, 153

CHAP. IX.

The Encouragements to this Work, and Easiness of succeeding in it, 174

CHAP. X.

That in order to our own Salvation, we ought to contribute to the Salvation of Others, 195

CHAP. XI.

The Conclusion of this whole Treatise, 210

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Every Man's Great Concern.

Chap. I.

The deplorable Ignorance, and general Blindneſs of Mankind, in this moſt important Affair.

THE Lives of moſt Chriſtians are ſo very diſagreeable to their Profeſſion, that a conſidering Man cannot, without ſome degree of Concern, obſerve their vehement Application to other Affairs, and their wretched Indifference in the Matter of Salvation. For is it not really, a moſt lamentable Miſmanagement, an Abſurdity rather, in a Man who pretends to walk *not by Sight*, but *by Faith*, to be ſo fond of the preſent periſhing Object, and to expreſs no manner of Regard for that happy Futurity, which muſt never have an End? To dote upon the

fleeting Trifles of This Life, and not ſuffer the laſting and ſubſtantial Advantages of the Next to make any manner of Impreſſion upon his Heart? To rely upon the flattering Promiſes of the World, which are no better than Treachery and Deceit, and diſtruſt the Power of the Almighty, and the unalterable Word of Him, who is Truth it ſelf? In a word; to lay claim to Heaven as his own proper Country, and produce ſo many Titles to that Inheritance; and yet at the ſame time to be ſo cloſely wedded to the World, which is no better than the Place of his Pilgrimage and Exile?

What ſtrange Spirit of Errour hath gotten poſſeſſion of us, that we ſhould behave our ſelves ſo very unlike Chriſtians? And how are our Hearts bewitched, that Vanity and Folly ſhould attract them ſo ſtrongly, while all the noble Idea's of another Life, which Religion preſents to us, are not able to move our Affections one whit? Certain it is, no Buſineſs can be of equal conſequence, and yet as certain too, that not any is ſo little regarded, as That of Salvation. For what Efforts do any of us make to attain a Kingdom, which is deſigned only for a Reward to that vehement Zeal, *which even takes it by force?* Where is the Man, that employs his Thoughts upon the Methods neceſſary for this purpoſe: much leſs, that cheerfully abandons all his other

other Interests, to lay himself out upon This alone? And how prodigious in the mean while is our Stupidity, which confines our Expectations and Designs within the narrow Limits of Time, when Faith hath filled our Souls with glorious Hopes, and given them a boundless Eternity to range in?

This Blindness and Insensibility, no doubt, is generally the Cause of the disorderly and debauched Lives, which the present Age so justly complains of; And of that fatal Coldness in Others of less scandalous Character; which it is the Design of this little Tract to remove, by representing to Christians, how very highly it concerns them, to be very serious and careful in the Business of their Salvation. And may that God, who first inspired me with this good Design, add to my Words that Weight and Efficacy peculiar to his own; That they may rouze the Indifferent and Unthinking into Consideration; and, like a Clap of Thunder, awaken the World out of their deep dead Sleep of Ignorance and Irreligion; and strike the Terror of his Judgments through every Corner of their Souls. Give Force, O Lord, and Life to my Discourse, that I may Proclaim to all the World afresh, those great and precious Promises, already published in the Gospel. And enable me, I beseech thee, to tear away this thick Veil

from before Mens Eyes, and to scatter that Darkness, which clouds and confounds their Understanding; that so, seeing our own true Interest, and following after Righteousness and true Holiness, we may obtain that Crown, which thou hast promised to as many as love and obey thee.

The only Expedient necessary for making a Christian sensible, how egregiously stupid and foolish Men are in this great Concern of Salvation, is to shew the Man to himself; and give him a true Representation of his Misery, his Weakness, his wretched Circumstances; and so to awaken him out of his profound Sleep by this lamentable Prospect. He comes into this World, in the Quality of a banished Man, into the Place of Exile to which he is condemned. His Life is a Journey through a strange Land; and his Death the thing, which determines his Banishment, and calls him home again. *I am a Stranger with thee, and a Sojourner, as all my Fathers were*, says the Psalmist, (*Psal.* xxxix. 12.) But who is there among all these Travellers, that seriously considers what Place he is going to? Every one goes his own Way, where Fortune or Humour leads: His Mind runs upon nothing but Interest, or Honour, or Preferment: Men pursue their Business, and their Projects, without reflecting, where all this will end at last. They give themselves

selves up to the Ramblings of their own Mind, and wander after their own Inclinations; and the Extremity of their Madness and Misery consists in this, that they are not sensible, what Way they are in, nor what Place it leads to. They are content to be ignorant in nothing, but the Concern of their Souls. Every Object they meet with in their Passage entertains them; but the End of their Journey never takes up their Thoughts at all. They are extreamly curious about the Accidents and Events of this Life; but not at all sollicitous what will become of them in a future and eternal State. And is not this every whit as extravagant, as it would be in a Pilot, to take great Pains for the informing himself in the several Seas he is to pass, and not venture on Board till he have made himself Master of all the Roads, where the Rocks and Sands lye, and how to keep clear of them; but at the same time never to trouble himself with learning what Port he is to make, or whither the Vessel is bound? So is Mankind; Each of them that ridiculous Traveller, that studies the Roads very carefully, and enquires out the good Inns, and how he may be best accommodated, but never thinks whither he is going, and what ought to be the Place of his Rest.

Nay, which is worſe, ſuch are not only the generality of Men, but the generality of Chriſtians too. They govern themſelves by falſe Rules of worldly and corrupt Wiſdom, ſet their Hearts upon the preſent, and have no regard, no ſenſe, of that which is to come. Men are inquiſitive how the World goes; deſirous to hear, grave in reflecting, ſerious in arguing and ſpending their Judgment upon every thing; but not the leaſt curious to hearken after any News concerning that everlaſting Kingdom, which our Religion propoſes to us; or Who governs and diſpoſes Matters there; or what Courſe is beſt to take for getting thither. Ah! *Chriſtian Brethren*, if that Name belong to us, if we have any Sparks of Faith ſtill alive in us, let us (as St. *Chryſoſtom* adviſes) lift up our Eyes toward this holy City; which is intended for our everlaſting Habitation. Let us firſt acquaint our ſelves with the King that Reigns there, and adore his Divine Majeſty with Reverence and holy Fear. Let us ſit down in Silence and profound Meditation, and obſerve all the great and marvellous Excellencies of our beloved Country. Let us get the beſt Inſtruction we are able in the Way thither, and obſerve the By-paths that would lead us wrong; the Turnings and Windings; the Dan-

Homo ad immortalium cognitionem nimis mortalis. Senec.

Hom. in S. Matt.

Dangers and Difficulties, through which we must pass to so holy and blessed a Dwelling. Let us consider the Honour and Reward of all those, who are thought worthy to be admitted thither: what sort of Life they lead when they are there; what profound Peace they enjoy; what Pleasures they are entertained with; what their Employment, and their Conversation. Such Reflections as these are absolutely necessary, if we do in good earnest desire to be saved. For St. *Augustin* hath observed very truly, that *He who knows not whither he goes, cannot possibly make any Progress in his Travels.* To go one knows not whither, is the Property of Brutes; and in Them it is excusable, because Nature hath qualified them for no better: But in a Man to set out without knowing where he is to take up, is a most insufferable Folly, and the last of all Reproaches. And yet, as absurd a Proceeding as this is, whom almost can we find, that behaves himself otherwise? What a World of Heat, and Eagerness, and Bustle, what Industry and Contrivance do we see upon all other Occasions? What Neglect and Indifference, what Coldness and Contempt in this great

Non bene curritur, cum quo currendum est nesciatur. Lib. de perf. Just.

Peregrinantibus in hac præsentis vitæ vastissima solitudine oportet nos nimirum scire quo tendimus, nam ambulare quotidie non præmeditato itineris fine imprudentissimum est. Lib. de Humil. c. 14.

Concern of Salvation? No Care is thought too much, no Application ſedulous enough to ſecure our Temporal Advantages; But our Everlaſting Intereſt we have no manner of regard for. We are like ſilly Children, taken up with Toys and Trifles. Our Minds ſo bewitcht, ſo prepoſſeſs'd with the Love of Senſible Objects, that we have no Reliſh left for thoſe that are Spiritual and Heavenly. We turn in a manner perfect Infidels; All that our Preachers tell us of another Life paſſes for Dream and Fable; The Hope of a Bliſsful Eternity, which Religion hath made ſo many Promiſes, and left us ſo ſtrong Aſſurances of, makes no Impreſſion upon our Hearts; becauſe indeed the Powers of Faith are weakned, and our Underſtandings refuſe to be governed any longer by this Principle. That incorruptible Treaſure, ſo magnified in Scripture, affects us much leſs than the periſhing unſtable Riches of the preſent Life. We decline enquiring into the Value of this Pearl of great Price, becauſe we have no inclination to ſell all we have, and give in exchange for it, *Matth.* xiii. which yet our Saviour adviſed as the greateſt Wiſdom, and moſt profitable Merchandize. To ſpeak to Men now upon the great Importance of looking after their Souls, is in effect to talk to People in a Lethargy. The impure Deſires of earthly Enjoyments have quite intoxicated their

their Minds, and they are grown perfectly insensible of Heaven and Heavenly Things. But this inward Stupidity, which is indeed one of the most fatal Diseases brought upon the Soul by Sin, proceeds originally from want of Consideration; and from that Ignorance and Disregard of a Future State, which Men are now so far from being ashamed of as they ought, that they even affect and put it on. This was St. *Augustin's* Condition, when, as himself confesses, "he walked in the "Follies of his Youth, in the "dark gloomy Night of his Passions, and "banish'd Heaven from his Thoughts. And "thus wandring from God, by the Irre-"gularity of his Life, and lo-"sing himself in the Mazes of "Sin and Errour, he became "a barren and unprofitable Soil, and fell "into the extremity of Misery. *Lib. Confess. 1. Cap. 18.* *Lib. Confess. 1. Cap. 10.*

When a Man is blind, and all the while fancies he sees, the Mischief is incurable. For what Course can be taken with Him, who hath no Sense of his Distemper? In such Cases, Men are in danger and yet feel nothing; they go wrong and imagine themselves in the right: And all this Spiritual Blindness is by the Prophet *Zephaniah* declared to be the Punishment of Mens Sins, (*Zeph.* i. 17.) A Man sees fair in foul Weather, and knows nothing of the Storm,

he walks in the Night, and is not ſenſible it is dark; he expoſes his Perſon to Danger, without the leaſt Proviſion or Defence againſt it; and never reflects ſo much as upon his own Ignorance and want of Reflection. He knows nothing of his own Condition; ſees no farther than his Senſes can carry him, and therefore cannot diſcover the Infirmities of his Soul; nor that Darkneſs, which clouds and miſleads his Affections, more than it impairs his Speculation and Underſtanding. In this wretched Confuſion he blunders thorough, like Men benighted in a thick Wood, who cannot diſtinguiſh any of the Objects that preſent themſelves. The Leaves affright them terribly, but the Pits and Precipices give them no apprehenſion at all. They are Bold, where they ſhould be Fearful, and Cowards where they ought to ſhew Courage. Thus is it with the Chriſtian, who is once confounded and beaten off from the Cate of what muſt be hereafter. He knows not what he does, nor whither he is moving; he takes the wrong Way for the right; forſakes the Truth, and follows after Lies; and his Heart grows ſo hard, ſo impenetrable to all Religious Impreſſions, that the Terrour of God's Judgments, the Fear of the laſt great Account, the Dread of that irreverſible Sentence, which the Goſpel hath recorded in Terms ſo full of Horrour;

rour; Thoſe piercing Eyes that ſearch the darkeſt Corners of the Heart; That Light from which nothing is hid; That inflexible Juſtice of a Judge upon whom no diſguiſe can paſs; and All thoſe awakening, or rather aſtoniſhing, Conſiderations, which the Chriſtian Faith repreſents to us, are utterly loſt, and can have no effect, upon him. He is deaf to the Calls of his own Conſcience, which frequently admoniſhes, and reminds him of his latter End, by Occaſions given from without. For every Creature, and what happens to each of them, are ſo many Mouths opened to warn Man, that He, like Them, muſt die, and quickly change. The mighty Revolutions in great Fortunes and Families; The ſurpriſing Diſgraces of Perſons in the higheſt Poſts; The deplorable End we frequently ſee made by obſtinate and profligate Wretches; The ſudden Sweeping away of Sinners, by which God ſpeaks to us, as by ſo many Inſtruments of his Wrath and Indignation, to fright us into better Manners, and call us back to our Duty, when the ſofter Voice of his Love and Kindneſs hath been neglected and deſpiſed; Theſe are ſo many Warnings; And yet we turn the deaf Ear even to theſe. And what hope then is there left, that his Word and Miniſters ſhould have any efficacy upon ſuch People? Nay, we are ſo unhappy as to abuſe thoſe very

Assistances he affords us, on purpose to prevent our ruine. In a word, we cannot endure Ignorance, and esteem it a Reproach in any sort of Business, but this necessary one; We affect to know every thing but the Darkness of our own Minds, and that we will not be made sensible of, because we Love and are Loath to Mend it.

This indeed is the Third Degree of Mens Folly in the general Ignorance and Disregard of their Salvation, and the Methods proper for obtaining it. And no question, This is an Aggravation much more deplorable than both the former. For if it be an Unhappiness to be Blind, to be fond of that Blindness is the very Extremity of Unhappiness. Now the Sinner is pleased with this wretched Condition, because it conceals his Misery from him: Darkness is therefore loved, because his Deeds are Evil; and Light hated, because it would make very unwelcome Discoveries, by shewing him the Errour of his Ways. He declines acquainting himself with the Judgments of God, because This Contemplation would urge him to Amendment of Life, and oblige him to break off the wicked Course of his sensual Delights. And therefore Thoughts upon so serious a Subject are not for his purpose. He concerns not himself, how Matters go in another State, for fear these

these Enquiries should rob him of the false Sweets of this. Such Ignorance is cherished and chosen for the sake of that thick Veil it puts before Mens Eyes, which keeps the gastly Objects of Death and Eternity out of Sight. By the Help of This it is, that the Sinner stifles all the good Motions and sound Reasonings, which Faith and Religion are apt to excite in his Heart; By This he gets loose from that Troublesome Caution, which is the natural Result of a strict impartial Account to be rendred to God for the whole Conduct of our Lives; And thus he sets himself free from all fear of present Ills, and all the Uncertainty of what will become of him hereafter: Thus thinking of nothing but Living here, without mingling any Thoughts of Death with his Reflections, he acts in full Agreement with his Principle; forms to himself a false Happiness, resulting from the Enjoyment of Worldly Advantages; the better to Erace all the Idea's of true Happiness in another World. And thus he falls, by degrees, from one Errour to another, tumbles from Precipice to Precipice; and becomes daily more incurably blind and senseless. His Sleep is so deep, so stupid, that Nothing can awaken him. For as Every thing hath a Mouth and Arguments for Goodness, to a believing and well-disposed Christian; so, to the obstinate and unbelieving, Every thing

is dumb, and the loudeſt Calls are loſt upon ſuch Wretches.

But the extravagant Folly and Madneſs of this Condition will yet more clearly appear, if we ſuffer our ſelves to reflect a little upon the Pains Chriſtians are at to deſtroy themſelves, in deſpight of all that Jeſus Chriſt hath done to ſave them. *Bleſſed God!* After our Chains are burſt, and all the Fetters of our Captivity broken to pieces; when the Lamb is ſlain, and Sin deſtroyed by the Sacrifice of him; when the Hand-writing of Death againſt us is cancelled and nailed to the Croſs, and Reconciliation between God and Man ſo ſolemnly ratified in the preſence of all the World; when we are tranſlated into the Condition of God's Children, and have his Kingdom ſetled for our Inheritance; ſhall All This be thrown away upon us? and do we ruine our ſelves as effectually, as if no part of it had ever been done in our behalf? Baptiſm, which gives all the glorious Hopes that can belong to Perſons adopted by God, by ſtripping us of our Old Man, and renewing us in the Spirit of the Inner Man; The Death of our Mediator, The unſpeakable Riches of his Mercy; The Sacraments, thoſe Pledges of His Love and Our Comfort; All ſignifie nothing to our advantage, by reaſon of our dreadful Abuſe of theſe Sacred Things. And what prodigi-

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ous Blindneſs is this, to ſtifle ſo great Grace, and ſtand it out againſt ſo ſtrong a Light! For Chriſtians are the Only Perſons, to whom this Kingdom of Heaven hath been promiſed or declared. The Law of Grace, that pure, that holy Law, unknown to the reſt of the World, it is Our Privilege to have revealed, and its Myſteries diſcovered to Us; To Us the Powerful Motives of Eternal Rewards and Puniſhments have been propoſed; We are that *choſen Seed*, that *holy Nation*, that *peculiar People*, mentioned by St. *Peter*, 1 Pet. ii. The *Children of Promiſe*, as *Iſaac* was, *Gal.* iv. nay, much more than that very *Iſaac*, who yet is ſaid to *have been born after the Spirit*.

The Circumſtances of the Age we live in are yet a farther Aggravation of this Wickedneſs and Folly. Religion is now in a flouriſhing Condition; The Church in outward Peace and Proſperity; Our Princes make Profeſſion of the ſame Faith: The Name of Chriſtian is a Title had in great and general Eſteem; and the Perſons who calls themſelves by it are in the higheſt Poſts of Honour and Power; and yet we ſuffer our ſelves to be worſted in the midſt of theſe Advantages, by that very Enemy, whom the Primitive Chriſtians vanquiſhed, in deſpight of outward Conflicts and bitter Perſecutions. They rendred their Faith triumphant in Priſons, and Tortures and Deaths;

Deaths; we tamely submit and yield the Prize, when nothing of all this threatens us. Our Advantages do us no service, because in the midst of such mighty Encouragements, such holy Laws, such sovereign Remedies, we part with our Crown, and plainly give it up, by a Conversation suitable to the Character of such only, as, whatever they may pretend, yet in reality, believe not one word of all the wondrous Things done by Christ for the Salvation of Mankind. We look upon the Life to come, as a hazardous and uncertain Thing, and the Manner of our Serving God plainly confesses, that we Entertain no great Expectations of getting any thing by him.

Is all this Blindness owing to our Pride? Or does the Corruption of our Manners harden and stupifie us? Or where is it, that we have drunk this Cup of Slumbring, which hath utterly defaced all remembrance of Heaven being our Heritage? What a Reproach is it to us, that instead of cherishing and supporting our Minds with hopes of Another Life, we trifle away our Time and Thoughts in the vain Desires of the Present? Hence it is, that the Indifference of Christians is made use of for an Argument to justifie the Libertinism of Infidels. And in good truth, when wicked and worldly Men observe such, entirely taken

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up in building ſtately Houſes, purchaſing great Eſtates, looking out for Settlements, and the like, how is it to be expected, that they ſhould believe what we tell them of our Faith and Religion? They will be apt to inferr our true Perſwaſion from the general Strain of our Actions and Deſigns, much rather than from our Words and bare Profeſſions. They will very hardly be perſwaded, that Men who live and project at this rate, look upon themſelves to be Strangers only and Pilgrims upon Earth. Certainly, were This our Opinion in good earneſt, we ſhould not be ſo mighty fond of ſtaying here; but well content to take ſome Pains about Heaven, if our Hearts and Hopes were really there. Thus they are confirmed in their Unbelief and Irreligion, by that immoderate Zeal for the preſent periſhing Advantages of this World, which they obſerve, in Men of a Principle, which teaches them to deſpiſe theſe, and ſeek things to come. The firſt Chriſtians were guilty of no ſuch Inconſiſtencies. When they once pretended to govern themſelves by this Principle, they did not only *take the ſpoiling of their Goods patiently*, but even abandoned them of their own accord; ſold their Eſtates, and laid them at the Apoſtles Feet; diſtributed to their Brethren, and reſerved to themſelves no Property in any Poſſeſſions here below; for the mighty In-

Influence, and glorious Idea's of a Treaſure Eternal, and that more enduring Subſtance, which the Goſpel had promiſed them in the Heavens.

Laſtly, The Extravagance of this Neglect appears yet more unaccountable, if to the wretched Conſequences attending it, (which I ſhall not here inſiſt upon particularly) we add that Other Conſideration, that it is ſo perfectly unprofitable to the Perſons indulging it. For can it be imagined, that the Senſual Man, in throwing off theſe Obligations of providing for the Soul, makes the wiſer choice for his own Safety and Advantage, when he labours to eaſe himſelf of the Cares, which ſo important a Concern ought in all reaſon to give him? Is that Peace, which the World promiſes, more certain to be attained, or more ſolid and ſtable in the Fruition, than that which God indents for? Are the Laws of Paſſion more gentle and eaſie to be ſubmitted to, than thoſe of Reaſon and Equity? Does a Man ſpeed better by that Confidence he repoſes in the vain Hopes of earthly Advantages, and all the ſubtle Projects of fleſhly Wiſdom? Is this a ſurer Defence againſt Accidents, or can we by it ſecure to our ſelves the Events of what we undertake? Will this keep a Man's Mind more quiet, and ſet him at reſt with regard to thoſe things, whoſe Conſequences are of Eternal Con-

Concern? Will Death by this Means ſpare him one Moment longer, or that Term of Years appointed for the Sinner, ſlacken their Pace one whit? No, no; The moſt exquiſite Humane Prudence cannot prolong our Lives one Minute, beyond the Period fix'd above. Death is the unavoidable Determination of all earthly Power and Greatneſs. This empty Figure of a World, which now dazles our Eyes with its Splendour, ſhall ſhortly diſappear like a Vapour. All the Pride of Humane Wiſdom muſt vaniſh as a Tract of Smoak, be reduced to a Handful of Aſhes, and a confuſed Heap of Duſt and Rubbiſh. And then the Worldling, who hath drudged on a Number of Years under the Yoke of his Paſſions, and been a Slave to his Appetite and inordinate Affections, will find nothing in himſelf but a vaſt Vacuity, and extreme Indigence of all ſubſtantial Comforts.

Where will then the Advantage be of his liſtening ſo readily to the Flatteries of the World, and continuing ſo obſtinately deaf to the Promiſes of God? Then ſhall the Proud and Vain take up the wiſe Man's Lamentation, (*Wiſd.* v. 8, 9.) *What hath Pride profited us? or what good have Riches with our Vaunting brought us? All thoſe things are paſſed away like a Shadow; they are gone by in an inſtant, and no ſign of them is to be found.* It will then be to no manner of purpoſe to

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take into their Mouths that insolent Boast, mentioned by *Isaiah*, (Ch: xxviii. 15.) *We have made a Covenant with Death, and with Hell are we at Agreement; When the overflowing Scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made Lies our Refuge, and under Falshood have we hid our selves.* For do but observe what follows, (Verse 18.) *Thus saith the Lord, Your Covenant with Death shall be disannulled, and your Agreement with Hell shall not stand. When the overflowing Scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.* In very deed, The utmost Power of Man is much too feeble to secure us against the Indignation of a provoked God; a God, from whom nothing can be hid; a God, whom no Strength can withstand. The Sinner, which placed his Trust in Greatness, is brought down; The Protection he depended upon, is confounded and lost; This haughty Dust and Ashes, is blown away with the blast of the Almighty's Displeasure. *The Extortioner is at an end, the Spoiler ceaseth, the Oppressors are consumed,* and that insolent Worm which to Day lifts up his Head, shall to Morrow be trodden under Foot, and crush'd to pieces. This is the Fate of all Them, who labour to Evade the Severity of the Divine Justice, by banishing from their Thoughts, and wiping out of their Hearts, all those wholesom and religious Impressions, which Faith had

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left engraved there, to put them in mind of their Salvation.

Let not Us then, who do not only call our ſelves, but I hope really are, Chriſtians, follow theſe Errours, ſo common among wretched Men; Let us not lend any Ear to that falſe Wiſdom of the World, which would draw us off from the Senſe and Conſideration of our Duty; nor be ſo cruel to our ſelves, as in Complement and indiſcreet Fondneſs for our Bodies, to ruine our Souls. Let us aſſure our ſelves, that the greateſt and moſt fatal of all Follies, is that of neglecting that moſt important Affair, our Eternal Salvation; and learn to conſult that, without which all our other Learning is in truth no better than Ignorance: Let us draw away this Veil from before our Eyes, which intercepts our Proſpect of Heaven, and break in ſunder the Bands, which faſten us down to Earth; Let us with Fear and Trembling look forward upon the Conſequences of this momentous Affair; conſidering with awful Fear the Deſigns of God toward us with regard to our Everlaſting State; and examining with Trembling the great Book that lyes before us; leſt we ſhould omit any part of That, which his Wiſdom hath made neceſſary to be done, in order to our Salvation. And, the better to quicken us in our preſent Unconcernedneſs, and

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ſet us free from thoſe fatal Inchantments, which diſpoſe us to value the Creature more than the Creatour; and to lay out our Love and Pains upon a frail and ſhort Life, rather than One which can never decay, never have an end; let us try to find out the bitter Spring, and true Original of this dangerous Ignorance; That ſo, by diſcovering the Root of our Diſeaſe, we may be the better able to apply proper Remedies. And the making this Diſcovery I deſign ſhall be the Buſineſs of my Second Chapter.

CHAP. II.

The Cauſe of this ſo general Blindneſs and Ignorance in the Buſineſs of Salvation: and What may beſt Prevent and Cure it.

MAn, ſince his Fall, is ſo wretchedly ignorant and feeble, that he is extreamly in the dark concerning his own true Advantage. And, as he hath but little Knowledge left to underſtand, ſo hath he yet leſs Inclination to purſue it. For the Byaſs to Corruption, which is now become natural, draws ſo ſtrongly downward, that he finds himſelf but very coldly affected with

with hopes of Heaven. All the Judgments he forms to himſelf are falſe, becauſe the Maxims of the Fleſh, which are the only Meaſures he goes by, are manifeſtly ſo. He miſtakes Good for Evil, and Evil for Good; Poyſon for Phyſick, and Phyſick for Poyſon; and his whole Conduct is one continued Errour. His Notions and Deſigns are all worldly, and this is the cauſe that none but ſenſible Objects affect him. He thinks nothing Real and Certain, but what is Preſent; All to come after Death paſſes for an imaginary Dream; and he cannot apprehend any thing in all thoſe Revelations which Faith hath made of a diſtant and eternal State. This is that Carnal Man, ſpoken of by the Apoſtle, (1 *Cor.* ii.) who cannot *underſtand the Things of God, becauſe they are Fooliſhneſs unto him.* His Mind is ſo debauched by his preſent Blindneſs, that he thinks all thoſe, who differ from him in Opinion, no better than Fools and Madmen. The Wiſdom which makes Salvation its great and only Care, paſſes for Bigottry of weak Minds; poor Wretches, who know no better, than to abandon All other Concerns for this One. His Heart confines it ſelf within the Condition of Mortality, and hath no regard at all to any thing beyond it. And all that Power of the New Man, which was put on in Baptiſm, is of little or no efficacy, for the

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poſſeſſing him with a juſt Apprehenſion of the really Good and Evil Things of this and another Life.

Thus he goes wrong, becauſe he knows not what Way he ought to go. He deviates into Evil, through Ignorance what is truly Good: He continues ignorant of Heavenly Things, becauſe he attends to none but Earthly: And hath no regard for Salvation, becauſe he hath no Idea of the great Importance this is of to him. His Underſtanding is full of Falſhood and Miſtake, becauſe his Inclinations are wholly upon the World. And they, who, according to the Apoſtle, *mind Earthly Things*, cannot poſſibly have their *Thoughts and Converſation in Heaven.* This ſeems to be the firſt Cauſe of Mens Ignorance and Neglect, in the great Concern of Salvation.

II. The Second proceeds from want of Faith, by which Men have but very weak and faint Perſwaſions of another Life; and from thence a Diſeſteem of the Recompence God hath prepared for them that love and ſerve him diligently. The Mind of Man is too groſs, clearly to conceive the Value of that hidden Treaſure mentioned and recommended to us in the Goſpel. Thoſe glorious Hopes of an everlaſting Kingdom, make but ſlight Impreſſions upon the Heart of moſt Chriſtians, becauſe they cannot frame a full and adequate Idea of them.

them. They are apt to queſtion, whether there be any ſuch thing, becauſe they cannot enter into the whole Myſtery of it. And the Deſigns of God for the Glory and Benefit of his Elect are ſo profound, the Greatneſs of his Promiſes ſo unſpeakable, the Wiſdom of his Judgments ſo incomprehenſible; that to ſenſual and carnal Minds, the very Excellence of theſe Things proves an hindrance and diſadvantage. Hence, (as the wiſe Man obſerved in another Caſe, (*Wiſd.* xvii. 1.) *unnurtured Souls have erred*, and deſpiſed thoſe Hopes, which they know not how to give themſelves a clear and diſtinct account of. Faith is unactive and aſleep, or rather extinct, in their Hearts; The little Glimmerings of it that remain are too faint and feeble, to guide Men in a Life, which in compariſon is no better than the Shadow of Death. To this Weakneſs of Faith the Inſenſibility of Mankind in their great Affair is very much owing; becauſe the very Greatneſs and Conſequence of that Affair is what they have no juſt Notion of. Hence they give away Pleaſures that laſt for ever, for thoſe which periſh in the uſing, and die in a moment; They Exchange their Title to a heavenly Inheritance, for ſome contemptible Advantage upon Earth; They fall into the ſame Extravagance, with that fooliſh Elder Brother; who, not conſidering the Privileges

of his Birthright, *ſold it for a Meſs of Pottage*, (Gen. xxv.) and loſe the Prerogative of that Divine Birth, and Adoption, conferr'd upon them in Baptiſm. *If thou knoweſt the Gift of God*, ſays the Saviour of the World, to the Woman of *Samaria*, (John iv.) and the Value of that Water, which is a living Well ſpringing up unto Life Eternal, thou would'ſt no longer thirſt after the foul and common Water of this World. The firſt Step of Chriſtian Prudence is to give Men a Diſreliſh of all temporal and corruptible Advantages. This ſhews them the Uncertainty, the Emptineſs, and Unprofitableneſs of thoſe Things, which uſe to poſſeſs our Affections; and undeceives them, by experimental Proofs how falſe and flattering theſe Expectations are. This ſhews us, that what Men reap hereafter will be the ſame in kind and proportion, with what they ſow here: and that as *He who ſoweth to his Fleſh, ſhall of the Fleſh reap Corruption*, ſo none but they who *now ſow to the Spirit*, ſhall then of *the Spirit reap Life Everlaſting*, (Gal. vi. 8.)

Another Effect of this Chriſtian Prudence, is the Teaching a Believer to walk *while he hath Light*; to Quicken him in his Buſineſs; Urging and Spurring him forward to do the utmoſt he is capable of; becauſe the Day of God draws on apace; And the *Night* will ſhortly overtake us in

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which no Man can work. And where Eternity depends upon a few Moments, there is no Time to ſpare, not one of thoſe Moments can with ſafety be loſt. Such a one therefore does not put off his Repentance to a Death-bed; He knows that the beſt and moſt pious Men find it exceeding difficult to keep their Mind intent upon God, when it is oppreſs'd with the heavy Burden, either of Age and its Infirmities, or of any violent Sickneſs and Affliction. But the Man who is weak in Faith, continues inſenſible of theſe things, and makes no ſuch uſeful Reflections. He forgets and diſregards while he is in Health; and, when he is Sick, he finds himſelf unable to purſue them, though he would never ſo fain. And thus Men often go out of the World without any true Senſe of another Life: Becauſe Faith is the only Principle, which can inſpire them with ſuch a Senſe; and this is darkned and in a manner quite quenched within the carnal Heart. What wonder then if they go aſtray, who neither think, nor know, whither they are going? For *if the Light that is in thee be Darkneſs; how great is that Darkneſs?* ſays our bleſſed Saviour, (*Matth.* vi. 23.)

III. A Third Cauſe of this Blindneſs is Preſumption. For, beſides the natural Effect of Pride to darken the Mind, God does, by way of juſt Puniſhment, take plea-

ſure in diſcovering his Secrets to the Weak and Humble; and in hiding them from the Proud and Wiſe in their own Conceits; thus making his judicial Darkneſs a Judgment for their Haughtineſs of Soul. He lets the One ſort into thoſe Myſteries, which are kept ſealed and lock'd up from the Other. He takes from the Vain that juſt Value for Eternity, which he gives to the Mean and Poor in Spirit; and is content to be found of Them only, who ſeek him with a pure and lowly Heart. It is to very little purpoſe, that we tell a proud Man of thoſe glorious Rewards propoſed in the Goſpel. He ſees not with an Eye of Faith, becauſe Pride hath blinded his Sight. The Humble only is throughly touched with that Awe of the terrible Judgment of God, which perhaps may ſtun and amaze the Proud, but makes no profitable Impreſſion upon him. And the Blindneſs, which ſuch a one hath voluntarily brought upon himſelf, being thus doubled by the pleaſure God takes in abandoning ſuch Perſons, he falls the deeper by all his Attempts to exalt himſelf higher. And the End of him at laſt is That of the Rebellious Angel, that Father of Pride, who, when he boaſted, that *he would ſet his Throne above the Stars of God*, was even *then brought down to Hell*, and thruſt into the bottomleſs Pit, (*Iſai.* xiv. 13, 15.)

IV.

IV. A Fourth Cauſe of this Spiritual Blindneſs, is a Corruption of Heart, proceeding from too great a Fondneſs for the World. For the World bewitches Mens Minds with ſpecious Outſides and fair Promiſes, and dazles them with a Counterfeit Shine of its glaring Vanities. And when a Man is once intoxicated with this Charm, the Underſtanding is darkned, the Affections are perverted, Truth and Subſtance are foregone for Shadows; The trifling Concerns of the World employ all his Time and Pains; he lives, as if he were never to die, and falls into an abſolute Forgetfulneſs of God. For (as the Apoſtle very truly obſerves) the *Friendſhip of this World is Enmity againſt God*, (James iv. 4.) And thus Life runs off in extreme Neglect, and horrible Contempt of Heaven and Salvation. The firſt and tenderer Years are full of Levity and Folly, Extravagance and Paſſion. The next Stage is expoſed to Anxiety and Diſcontent; and the Intervals, which Pleaſure and Diverſion give to theſe, fly over his Head ſwiftly and without any Thought. Then comes Old Age, which, like Ice, chills and freezes up all the Vigour and Sprightlineſs of our Faculties; And after being teazed and tired out with Cares, which are good for nothing, but to diſtract and cut one's Heart to the quick, we waſte away at laſt in fruitleſs Deſires of

Peace and Quiet; and feed our ſelves with fond Imaginations of a Happineſs never to be attained. I mention not at preſent the Inſignificance of all that Buſtle and Buſineſs Men engage in, *whoſe weightieſt Affairs are in truth but meer Trifles*; Though this be a ſore Aggravation of their Miſery; that in ſuch fruitleſs Cares as theſe, Men ſquander away that precious Time, given them by God for nobler Purpoſes; and lengthened out, that they may make their heavenly Inheritance more ſure. Nor will I here enlarge upon the Vanity and Delicacy, of the Female Sex eſpecially; who ſeem ſo totally devoted to that One Care of rendring themſelves agreeable to the World, that we can ſcarce diſcover what Portion of their Time is left for working out their Salvation. The unreaſonable Partiality, they expreſs for their Bodies, does but too loudly ſpeak their Cruelty and want of Concern for their Souls. Nothing indeed draws off a Man's Mind more from attending to the Buſineſs of Salvation, than the immoderate Affection for the World, which loads him with all the Incumbrances of Life, and makes him ſink under the Burden. And, under ſuch Oppreſſion, it is not eaſie to conceive, how a Mind ſhould enjoy that Freedom, which is neceſſary, to purſue Heavenly Things. An Inſtance whereof we ſee in the People of *Iſrael*, who could not hearken

hearken to *Moſes*, not at all comfort themſelves with a Proſpect of the Land he promiſed them from God, by reaſon of that exceeding hard Toil, and Dejection of Spirit, to which their *Ægyptian* Bondage had reduced them. How deaf, alas! are Chriſtians in like manner to all the Promiſes of another Life, when groaning under extremity of Want, or ſome other very ſenſible and grievous Affliction? For the Soul of Man being in ſome degree enſlaved to his Body, and tenderly touched with all its Wants; when under a Load of Hardſhip from without, it turns readily to ſenſible Objects, as Remedies near at hand, but is not at leiſure to raiſe it ſelf up to the Contemplation of ſuch as are Remote and Eternal. In ſhort, by this wretched Inclination to the World, Men inſenſibly diſuſe themſelves from ſo much as thinking of their true, their heavenly, Country, where the Hopes and Deſires of true Believers are fixed. Our Minds by this means are as it were inverted quite; and that, which in its original Conſtitution was deſigned to be ever looking up towards Heaven, is thus bowed down to Earth. For nothing diſpoſes Man to forget God ſo effectually, as Fondneſs for the World; and nothing makes him cleave ſo cloſe to the World, as not knowing the Nature of Things here below; and not remembring what thoſe are, which we

are commanded to expect hereafter. So that in truth a Man throughly poſſeſs'd with the Spirit of this World will ſoon be involved in the very Blackneſs of Darkneſs; Darkneſs ſo groſs, that not one Ray of heavenly Light will be able to preſerve it ſelf alive, for the healing his Blindneſs, and recovering him to a Senſe of his Duty again.

V. The Fifth Cauſe is a certain Cowardice and Tameneſs of Soul, which is apt to recoil upon the leaſt Difficulties. Inſtead of a Mind firm and reſolv'd enough to forego the Preſent, and keep our Eyes and Hopes upon the Future only: Inſtead of that Gallantry, which ſhould raiſe us above the things that are ſeen, and aſpire to thoſe excellent Advantages only, which are diſtant and unſeen; which ſhould ſhut our Eyes againſt all Conſiderations of worldly Intereſt; adore and depend upon a God, who dwells in Light, inacceſſible, otherwiſe than through the dark Glaſs of Faith; which ſhould ſerve a Maſter diligently, from whom we expect our Wages in another Life only; ſhould continue deaf and inſenſible to all thoſe ſecret Satisfactions, by which the Pleaſure we feel in the Practice of Virtue is apt to exalt us; and not to court the Praiſe and good Opinion of Men, though we do nothing but what deſerves to be commended; Inſtead, I ſay, of all this Chriſtian Gal-

Gallantry, which ſhould ſupport and animate us in the conſtant Profeſſion and vigorous Practice of a Religion ſo pure and holy as Ours; and in every Action of our Lives demonſtrate that new Spirit which Baptiſm endued us with; We ſuffer our ſelves to be diſcouraged in doing well by every idle Imagination; form to our ſelves unneceſſary Terrours; and every Real Obſtruction we magnifie, and run away from. This continual War, which a Man is engaged in with himſelf, terrifies the ſtouteſt of us all; and the narrow humble Way of the Goſpel ſeems too rough and hard for the Chriſtian to ſubmit to, who repoſes his Confidence in his own Virtue. We degenerate by degrees into that wretched miſgiving Temper of the old *Iſraelites*, who ſuffered their Hearts to fail, upon the diſtant diſagreeing Reports of the Dangers and Difficulties, which were ſaid to await their Paſſage into the Land of Promiſe. Thus the feeble-minded Chriſtian gives way to falſe Impreſſions, and ſinks under the formidable Idea's of Vertue and Salvation; trembles at the Sword, which divides between the Fleſh and Spirit; eſteems the watchful Guard over himſelf and all his Actions an impracticable Duty; and reſolves the glorious Things, ſpoken of another Life, into Flights and Hyperbole. But in the midſt of all this Littleneſs of

Soul, he labours for false Reasons, invents pitiful Excuses, and would put upon us with wretched Pretences, to conceal the Degeneracy of Spirit. And thus he falls by degrees from being discouraged into Distrust; from thence into Despair; from despairing to obtain, into a total disregard and forgetfulness of, Salvation; of which he entertains no farther Notions, than such as represent it, as a thing, either Romantick in it self, and above the Power of any Man to attain; or at least so much Superiour to His Abilities, that it is by no means possible for Him ever to come up to it.

VI. A Sixth Source, from whence this general Blindness and Ignorance in Spiritual Concerns flows, I take to be a sort of Insensibility in Matters relating to Heaven and a Future State. What may be the particular Occasion of things of this kind affecting us so very little, is not easie positively to determine; But plain it is, that things at hand give us a very tender Concern, while those at a distance scarce obtain one Thought from us. This may possibly be owing to a natural Levity of Temper, which dispoſes our Minds to great Seriousness, nay even Perplexity of Thought, upon very trifling Occasions, while we find it exceeding difficult to fix them upon Subjects of Weight and Consequence: Or it may

may proceed from an intemperate Fondneſs for our own Perſons, which cannot away with Reflections ſo very ſhocking, as thoſe of Death and our latter End: Or it may be the Effect of Luxury and extreme Effeminacy; A Life that deals in nothing, and can reliſh nothing, but Diverſion and Merriment, and Pleaſure. But be the Cauſe what it will, the Effect is but too manifeſt; That, while we walk on by no other Guidance but that of a dark and carnal Principle, and ſhut our Eyes againſt the better Suggeſtions of the Spirit, we lay aſide all Care for the Soul, and expend all upon the Body; leave the Maſter in Captivity, to gratifie the Slave; beſtow our Thoughts upon the Affairs in which Mortality is concern'd, and entirely neglect the weightier Matters of Eternity. For how ſedulous, how full of Contrivance do we ſee the Politician and buſie Projector, to compaſs his Ends, and bring his Schemes to bear? What a perpetual Ferment of Mind is the ambitious Man under to raiſe himſelf? What Diſquiets and Diſtractions is the covetous Man content to endure for the ſake of a little Wealth? And how many Shifts, and Doubles, and ſubtle Plots, does the Wiſdom of this World lay and employ in all its Purſuits; while every Proſpect of a Chriſtian, whoſe Ends alone are noble, and the Effect of true Wiſdom, lan-

languiſh and die upon our Hands? For indeed * the Men of this World ſet themſelves to think of every thing with Induſtry and Application, except of that only thing, which deſerves and would anſwer their utmoſt Application. How comes this Spirit and Behaviour to prevail now, ſo contrary to what we may obſerve reigning in Chriſtians heretofore? Is it leſs our Duty or our Intereſt to work out our Salvation, than it was theirs, of whom St. *Chryſoſtom* ſpeaks † ſo affectionately; Who withdrew from the World into the moſt unfrequented Mountains and Deſerts, and choſe all the Horrours of Solitude, that Converſation and the World might give no Interruption to their holy Cares and heavenly Contemplations? They watered their Beds with their Tears, from that awful Dread of the laſt Judgment, with which their Hearts were poſſeſſed, and the conſtant View of that Day of Trembling and Aſtoniſhment, when the Son of Man ſhall call Mankind to account for their Works: All which diſmal Scene Meditation kept conſtantly before their Eyes. In purſuance of this Reflection it was, that thoſe good Men humbled their Souls, by ſubduing ſo effe-

* *Magna confuſio, quod ardentius illi perniciosa deſiderant quam Nos Utilia. Citius ad mortem, properant, quam Nos ad vitam.* Bern. Ser. 1. de alt. cord.

† *Chryſoſtom in Matth.*

effectually, and mortifying so very zealously their Body and its Appetites. And are We so much more secure of escaping at that terrible Day, than They were, that We are so much at Ease? Is Our Piety greater in proportion as our Fears and Concern are less? Or is it not rather a sort of Spiritual Stupidity, which is proof against all Impressions of Goodness; And a thick Night of Corruption, that clouds our Understandings, and obstructs them from seeing things, as those bright Patterns saw them? Let us at least Blush and be out of Countenance, when Our Manner of Living is compared with these Devout Recluses; and if Their Example will not inspire us with an equal Degree of Zeal, yet let it awaken us however out of our Sleep, and set those Powers and Affections on work, which are grown cold and unactive, through this Spiritual Stupidity and Neglect.

In a word, The Corruptions of the World, The Frailty of our Flesh, The Common Infirmities, to which the Condition and Accidents of Humane Life expose us, The Ignorance and Levity natural to our Minds, The Errours and Extravagance of our Affections; The Charms of Prosperity, and the Depressions of Adversity, (both which conspire in weakning the Principle of Faith in us) The false View of Humane Reason, and the infinite Variety

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of Contingences in our Affairs, furniſh ten thouſand Occaſions of this Spiritual Blindneſs, and muſt of neceſſity deſtroy us, were it not for that Antidote and Defence, that Support and Strength, which the Law of Jeſus Chriſt, by ſuccouring and ſuſtaining us with, does approve it ſelf indeed a Well-ſpring of Eternal Life, in every one of our Hearts. And this, O my God, it muſt be thy doing to render effectual: Thou, that makeſt Light to come out of Darkneſs, canſt alſo bring Knowledge out of Ignorance, by commanding thy Grace to ſhine in our Miſery, and piercing our Hearts through with its enlivening Beams; Thou only canſt, in the Apoſtle's Phraſe, make thoſe to *become Veſſels of thy Mercy*, which had deſerved to be *Veſſels of Wrath* and extreme Vengeance. And Thou wilt do it, provided we do Our part; The firſt Step whereof is to conſider of what Conſequence this Affair is to us, which the Goſpel hath taken care to repreſent as the Chriſtian's *One Thing neceſſary*. For nothing is more capable of quickening Men up to a due Care for their Salvation, than the raiſing their Thoughts by degrees toward Heaven; and accuſtoming themſelves to form noble and worthy Idea's of that unſpeakable Reward, that infinite Happineſs, which God hath prepared for them. This is the Only Remedy againſt that Blindneſs

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Men are involved in upon the present Occasion. Let us therefore labour for that Heavenly Wisdom, which may inspire a Christian with the same ardent Desires in pursuit of his Treasure in Heaven, which we daily observe in Worldlings for their perishing Treasures upon Earth: Let us not grudge to take as much Pains for the Saving our Souls, as They do for the Filling their Bags and their Coffers: And, that we may the more easily vanquish all those Difficulties which attend us in our Way; let us strengthen our selves with a vigorous and lively Faith, which may scatter those formidable Idea's, and fill us with bright Assurances of that Crown, which God hath promised and designed from our very first setting out; and which will most certainly adorn the Head of every one that strives lawfully. For Faith is that Divine Light, which opens to us that Immensity of the Years of God's Eternity, which *David* took care to keep perpetually in remembrance, (*Psal.* lxxvii.) This draws our Meditations up to Heaven, and discovers to us the Greatness and Majesty of that Supreme God, who hath promised himself to be our Reward. In a word, Faith can best convince us how very important this Affair is, and which way it comes to be so: The full Representation whereof, I intend to make the Subject of my next Chapter.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

Wherein the Mighty Importance of this Affair consists.

THE only Remedy to be applied for Cure of that Evil Diſeaſe, of which we have been hitherto diſcovering the Symptoms and Cauſes, is bringing the Chriſtian to a right Senſe, what Conſequence this will be of to him. This is the Knowledge, which alone can be abſolutely neceſſary, and all other Sciences ought to be indifferent in his eſteem, becauſe they are of no ſervice towards ſecuring him a happy Eternity: And certain it is, that the more ſtrongly he is perſwaded of the Uſefulneſs and Neceſſity of this Knowledge, the more diligent he will be in the acquiring it. But ſtill, let a Man's Application be never ſo great, yet in this Holy Art there can but ſmall Progreſs be made, by them who walk only by their own Light. The Underſtanding of Man is much too ſhort and feeble, to fathom the depth of this Secret; And therefore do Thou, O God, who alone canſt comprehend the Worth and Greatneſs of that Glory promiſed to thy Faithful Servants, do Thou ſend down a Ray from above; Enlighten my Mind, that I may convince Men, that Chri-

Chriſtians cannot poſſibly have any Intereſt upon Earth ſo valuable, as may pretend to come in competition with that of their Souls, and Eternity.

Now this Importance ſeems chiefly to manifeſt it ſelf by Three Conſiderations.

Firſt, The ineſtimable Excellence of that Glory which God hath prepared for the Saints.

Secondly, In the Extraordinary Methods he is pleaſed to make uſe of for the effecting our Salvation.

Thirdly, In the Terrible Conſequences of that Eternal Doom, upon which the whole Iſſue of our Affairs at laſt muſt turn. To theſe I ſhall ſpeak particularly.

The Firſt is the Excellence of that Glory provided by God. For all the precious and moſt deſirable Things of this World, are no better than Droſs and Dung in compariſon, or rather, are by no means fit ſo much as to be named or compared with it. The Holy Goſpel, which deſcribes things as they are, and affects no artful Exaggerations to magnifie them by, compares the Deſign of Proſecuting this Salvation, to a *hidden Treaſure* and a *Kingdom*; Intimating, that a Man is truly enriched and becomes greater, from the Inſtant of his entertaining Deſires and Reſolutions of this

this Kind. And that Prince in St. *Luke*, who left his own Country to conquer a foreign Kingdom, and take poſſeſſion of it, is (according to the Allegorical Style of the New Teſtament) a very lively Image of a Chriſtian ſetting his Thoughts and Affections upon Heaven. Now, if the bare Deſigns and Endeavours of Salvation have ſomething in them ſo truly great, ſo highly valuable, what can we think of the Prize it ſelf which is thus purſued? And of what Conſideration can any other Affairs be, when weighed againſt This, ſince even the nobleſt Projects, and vaſteſt Attempts our Minds are capable of, muſt of neceſſity ſink and be buried in the Grave? This World hath nothing durable in it, except what tends to the promoting of this One Great Work: And whatever falls ſhort of Eternal, ought to be of no great eſteem, with Men who are endued with Immortal Souls. The wiſe and honourable Men of this World have not always the juſteſt Notions of ſuch Matters. God imparts the Sweets of his hidden Manna to meek and humble Souls; ſuch as he inſpires with a due Value for that incomprehenſible Myſtery, which he hath not revealed to the Proud. How happily was that eminent Martyr St. *Ignatius* let into this Secret, when, upon his Condemnation to die for the Truth, he cried out full of rapture,

ture, *Now I begin to be a Christian indeed, for I find in my self no Desires left of these Temporal Things that are seen.* And those Holy Saints, of whom the Book of Wisdom speaks, (Ch. iii.) had a true taste of it, which made the firmness of their Courage shine so conspicuously in the midst of Sufferings and Torments; because *their Hope was full of Immortality.* How comes it then to pass, that our Zeal is so faint and cold, in Tryals far inferiour to those, in which the Strength and Fervour of these good Mens Minds was so conspicuous, so invincible? What Hopes had They, which We have not equal Grounds for? Or what Recompence did Their Religion propose, which Ours does not assure Us of? Is it not plain from this difference in our Behaviour, that Faith, which enflamed Their Affections, is cold and almost quite extinct in Our Breasts. Let us at least endeavour to revive and kindle it afresh, by the consideration of those Circumstances, which may assist us in passing a true Estimate upon that excellent Reward, which God hath promised and prepared for his Elect under the Gospel.

Nunc incipio esse Christi Discipulus, nihil desiderans eorum quæ videntur. *Hieron. de Scrip. Eccl.*

But where shall I find Words large and expressive enough to set forth the glorious Heritage of the Children of God; the Greatness of that Kingdom, which is established

bliſhed for ever; the Vaſtneſs of that Treaſure, that does not only exceed, but include, all other Riches and Treaſures whatſoever; that Happineſs ſo pure, ſo ſtable, ſo ſubſtantial, which the Prophet aſſures us, cannot fall within the compaſs of a Humane Underſtanding worthily to conceive them? And certainly, if God have imparted ſuch Beauty to Creatures, in common eſtimation low and little; If he hath ſo admirably clothed the Lillies of the Field, and adorned our Gardens with ſuch exquiſite Art, as the Scriptures take notice (*Matth.* vi.) what Diſcoveries of his Goodneſs, muſt we in reaſon ſuppoſe will be made, when the infinite Riches of his Almighty Power ſhall be diſplayed, to make Man compleatly happy; Man, who is the Lord of the Creatures here below, and the wondrous Maſterpiece of the Creating Wiſdom? What a glorious Scene will open in that Day, when God, whom we at preſent can only ſee darkly through the Glaſs of Faith and this thick Veil of Fleſh, ſhall exhibit himſelf freely to the Spirits of Juſt Men made perfect, and admit them to a full ſight and fruition of all his Beauty and Majeſty? How great muſt the Truth and Science needs be, whoſe Shadows are ſo bright, whoſe diſtant Figures are ſo full of Wonder? For if ſome eminent Philoſophers have look'd for Happineſs in the Sedate Con-

Contemplation of the Heavens, and other beautiful Works of Nature, What raviſhing Delights will overflow that Soul, which ſhall be admitted to know, and familiarly converſe with Thee, our Great God? to ſee the Secrets of Thy Eſſence, and dive into that Abyſs of Perfection, which Thou haſt thought fit as yet to place far above out of our ſight; to obſerve the infinite Fruitfulneſs of that productive Spirit, which is the Source of all thy Emanations; and underſtand the myſterious and now incomprehenſible Deſigns, which at preſent we muſt be content humbly to adore in thy Providence and Government of the World? And how tranſporting ſhall be the Pleaſure of poſſeſſing thee, by virtue of that Knowledge, which our bleſſed Saviour hath taught us is *Eternal Life*, and the very thing in which the Happineſs of the Saints conſiſts. Oh! Bleſſed ſure is that Believer, who, tired and ſick of the Creatures, ſhall throw himſelf into the Boſom of the Creatour, and there enjoy perfect Tranquillity; like a skilful and proſperous Pilot, who after being toſs'd with Storms at Sea, puts into Port, and makes himſelf amends for all the Hazard and Trouble of his boiſterous Voyage!

Then ſhall that vaſt extent of the Humane Mind, which is the true, the diſtinguiſhing Character of its Greatneſs and Excellence,

cellence, be fully satisfied. Then shall the natural Restlesness of Man's Desires be composed and quieted; which here seek Ease in vain, and aim at every thing, but can find nothing able to content them; His utmost Cravings shall then be answered, for God himself will be his exceeding great Reward. He will fill these most capacious Souls of ours to the full, with the abundance of his Perfections. * In him they shall be sure to find all they can desire; And He alone to Them will be All in All. They shall enjoy the same refined Delights with God himself. And Joy shall then be the very Life and Soul of this blessed Life. Every Subject of this everlasting Kingdom shall be himself a King, *Rev.* 15. and each of the Faithful placed upon the Throne of God. The Body and Soul both shall there be full of Bliss. For Tears and Troubles, and Pains, which now waste the Body; Discontents, and Disquiets, and Fears, and every uneasie Resentment, which here afflict the Soul, shall be for ever banished from those blissful Mansions; as the beloved Apostle in his Revelation hath positively assured us, (Ch. xxi.) In a word; How great must that Recompence reserved in Heaven for us needs be, when the di-

* *Plenitudo quam exp. Etanus a Deo, non erit nisi de Deo.* Bern. Serm. 11. in cap. 1. Cant. *Omnia nobis ipse erit, quando ipso sufficiente nihil deerit.* August. lib. contra Serm. Arrian. c. 37.

distant Hope of it, which we conceive but imperfectly, in this World, is attended with heavenly Delight; a Delight more pure, more entertaining, than all the Pleasures this World can afford!

And is it possible now for Men to assent to these Truths, and think at all, and yet not be very sensibly affected with the Reflection? Can we be satisfied of the Value of our heavenly Prize, and not thirst and pant continually after it? What wretched Stupidity is this, to be more fond of our Misery and Weakness, than of a State of absolute Perfection; to prefer the Decay of the *Old* Man before the never-fading Youth and Beauties of the *New*; And wish more eagerly for the Storms of this troublesome Life, than for the profound and settled Calm of Eternity? Can we after all this have the senslessness to put the Good Things of this World, into the Balance against those of Heaven, and so much as admit them to the honour of a Comparison, when, if we had no other Arguments to prove their Insufficiency, the very Enjoyment of them will abundantly convince us of their Vanity and Imperfection? For there is not any one Pleasure in this Life, which when freely indulged, does not end in Pain and Uneasiness: The most exquisite Sweets here have a mixture of Bitter in their Composition; but every thing

thing above is ſincere and complete, without the leaſt Allay to take from its Reliſh and Enjoyment. This made the Royal Prophet break forth, (*Pſal.* lxxxiv.) *How amiable are thy Dwellings, thou Lord of Hoſts! My Soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the Courts of the Lord; my Heart and my Fleſh crieth out for the Living God.* And theſe Deſires are uſual with true Believers, whoſe eager Wiſhes are upon their beloved Country; and, in the ſame proportion that theſe Deſires after everlaſting Felicities grow ſtronger, in the very ſame does their Indifference and Diſreliſh of temporal Enjoyments increaſe. Let us then imitate theſe holy Men; let us qualifie our ſelves for Heaven by devout and hearty Deſires at leaſt, and thus ſupply that Merit, which Works muſt want. For the Life of a Chriſtian indeed ought to be One continued eager Deſire after Heaven.

And ſhall we ſuppoſe, that ſo precious a Treaſure is not richly worth all the Trouble we can poſſibly be at to obtain it? Can this Life, that is but a Scene of Miſery, ſhort at the longeſt, deceitful at the beſt, Can This deſerve a higher Place in our Affections, than all that Glory, with which the infinite Power and Goodneſs of God hath decreed to crown his Faithful and Choſen Ones? We could not be inſenſible how weighty theſe Conſiderations are, did we

we but rightly comprehend our Intereſt in them. But alas! Heaven is a Myſtery, even to them that believe; and, with them who do not, this Myſtery paſſes for a Fable. The beſt Notions we have of it are ſo ſhort and imperfect, that it is not much to be wondred at, if the Hopes grounded upon them have no ſtronger effect upon our Minds. For indeed it is ſo vaſtly above our largeſt Idea's, that we may allow it in ſome ſenſe incomprehenſible. But ſince this is a Difficulty ariſing only from the ſurpaſſing Excellence of the thing, it will perhaps be more proper for me to adviſe Men, that they would employ their Thoughts much upon it, and by frequent and ſerious Meditation raiſe their Idea's of it to as worthy a pitch as they are able, than to ſpend more time in enlarging upon a Subject, which I moſt freely acknowledge, no Words, and much leſs mine, can be ſufficient for.

II. The Second Conſideration, which may be of ſome ſervice to us, towards comprehending the great Importance of our Salvation, conſiſts of thoſe extraordinary Means, which Almighty God hath been pleaſed to make uſe of for the effecting it. For what Probability is there, that all the greateſt and moſt wonderful Springs of his Almighty Power ſhould be ſet on work, if the Deſign to be brought about

were not proportionably noble? We may easily be satisfied in that Providence by which Nature is governed, that he will not interpose his Sovereign Power upon trivial Occasions; and yet that he does manifestly so order Matters, that all the Frame of Nature is made instrumental to the Glory of the Saints. And Reason good; since all, that depends upon Time, ought to pay Homage to Eternity. Now, although the general Conduct of Providence in the Administration of this lower World be in a great measure concealed from us, yet thus much we may be satisfied of, that nothing comes to pass here upon Earth, but it hath some respect to God's Decree of saving his Elect. Because the Dispensation of Nature is inferiour to that of Grace, and the Things that are Temporal ought to be subordinate to those that are Eternal. This Consideration probably moved the Prophet to say, that *all God's Ways were wonderful in Judgment*, (Deut. xxxii.) And thus at last we learn, that this World, which employs all the Study of Learned and Speculative, and the Busie Contrivances of Politick and Intriguing Men, is made purely for the sake of another, an Invisible, World; And the Creatour orders the Movements and Changes of the One so, that each of them should conduce to the establishing of the Other. This long universal Chain of Causes

ſes and Effects, The regular Succeſſion of thoſe Events ſo various in Humane Life, That wiſe Order, which governs and directs the unſeen Springs of the Divine Operations, and every Accident that comes to paſs in the common Courſe of the World, are for the Advantage of God's Choſen. The ſecret Tendency and Relation, which Temporal Things have to ſuch Men's Eternal Happineſs, is One of the ſublimeſt and moſt amazing Myſteries of Providence. Nay, as the Scripture acquaints us, that the Heathen Nations were chaſtiſed to be a Warning and Inſtruction to his own People; ſo is the Imperfection of thoſe who are not the Choſen and Faithful of God ordered to the Benefit and Perfection of ſuch as are. 'Tis to build up this holy and peculiar Nation, that he pulls down and roots out others. Even the Revolutions of whole States and Kingdoms, and the moſt concerning Events in the Affairs of this World, are ſometimes the Inſtruments God thinks fit to uſe, for the Salvation of Thoſe, whom he hath choſen Partakers of his Glory. Such myſterious Proceedings as theſe in this great Work, occaſioned that Exclamation of St. *Paul*, (*Rom.* xi. 33.) *Oh the depth of the Riches both of the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God! how unſearchable are his Judgments, and his Ways paſt finding out!* This is the Power, which the Son of God hath

received from his Father, to be the Lord and Diſpoſer of Temporal Life, for the procuring Men Eternal Life; and to exerciſe an abſolute Dominion over the Fleſh, in order to ſaving and exalting the Spirit. And, though God bear no ſhare in the Wickedneſs of Men, nor is his Holineſs accountable in any degree, for thoſe Acts of Impiety and Injuſtice, which he gives them the power of committing; yet does he ſo far intereſt himſelf even in theſe Matters, as frequently to leave ſome very remarkable Footſteps of his Supreme Equity, nay even of his Goodneſs, in the very greateſt Diſorders that happen in the World. He over-rules the Paſſions of wicked Men ſo, that they ſhall ſometimes plainly illuſtrate his Juſtice, or give diſtinguiſhing Marks of his Mercy. Thus the Conqueſt of the Jews by Foreigners, their long Bondages, in *Egypt* firſt, and afterwards in *Babylon*, were ſo contrived as to be moſt glorious Inſtances of his Favour to the Afflicted; and to produce many bright Patterns of Piety and Virtue, as well as to leave behind them ſome Footſteps of True Religion, and the Knowledge of the One Supreme God. Our Saviour himſelf declares, (*Matth.* xxiv.) that *for the Elect's ſake thoſe Days of Terrour ſhould be ſhortned*: which he there deſcribes as ſo dangerous a Tryal of their Faith and Patience: And

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we ſhall not think this Matter overſtrained by affirming, that, for the ſake of making One Saint, God may think fit to overturn whole Empires, when we conſider of what vaſt extent that Paſſage of St. *Paul* is to the Primitive Chriſtians, *All things are for Your ſakes.*

Theſe are indeed very profound and myſterious Truths, Deſigns laid too deep, and in themſelves too vaſt, for Us to comprehend: But though we cannot underſtand them, yet, provided we have an humble Faith, we may be aſſured of them beyond all reaſonable doubt; I ſay, provided we apply our ſelves to obſerve the Methods of Providence, which God himſelf hath diſcovered to us. For if he took delight to humble other Nations, in favour and advantage of his own People; If he ſacrificed *Egypt*, *Ethiopia*, and *Saba*, and ſo many other Kingdoms beſides, to the Temporal Intereſt of the Jews, (as *Iſaiah* tells us he did, Ch. xliii.) what may we not reaſonably expect him to do, for the Eternal Happineſs of Them who love and ſerve him? The Way, by which he led that People to the Promiſed Land, was full of Miracles in every part of it: He opened the Depths of the Sea, to bring them out of Slavery, and conſtrained the very Elements to make a Paſſage for his Freed-men; He overturn'd the Walls of a ſtrong City

with the Sound of Trumpets, to ſettle them peaceably in the Country he had mark'd out for them. The Mouths of ravening Lions were cloſed up at his Word, for the Preſervation of *Daniel*; and the Rage of devouring Flames ſtopp'd, to pay a due Regard to the Purity of the Three Children thrown into the burning fiery Furnace, for refuſing to Worſhip an Idol; And, upon many other Emergencies, he hath changed and inverted the ordinary Courſe of Nature, by ſtrange unheard-of Prodigies, to ſignalize his Protection and Favour of that Race of Men, whom he had choſen out for Temporal Proſperity. And can we imagine, that he will be more ſparing towards that Spiritual Seed, whom he hath appointed to Happineſs in Heaven? St. *Paul* was plainly of another mind, when he told the Chriſtians (1 *Cor.* 10.) that all the Miracles of the Law were yet but Shadows and Figures of the Stupendous Things to be done for bringing Men to Grace and Glory. Let us then obſerve the Publick Calamities, the Devaſtations of Countries, the Change and Tranſlation of Empires, the Revolutions of States, the Riſe and Fall of Kings and Commonwealths, which happen in the World; but ſo obſerve, as to conſider them, like ſo many Red-Seas for the Spiritual *Iſrael*, the Friends of God, to paſs over, while his Enemies periſh in the

the Waters. These are the hideous barren Deserts, through which Believers travel to Heaven, of which the Land of *Canaan* was but a poor Representation. These are the Walls of *Jericho* tumbled down, that God upon their Ruines may build the City of the Faithful, even *Jerusalem* which is above. For the Honour, nay the Goodness of God is concerned in afflicting and destroying those here, whom he intends to save hereafter: and the Loss he suffers them to sustain at present, is frequently one of his most valuable Blessings. He is severe for a moment, with intentions of everlasting Kindness afterwards. And these present seeming Neglects and Desertions are a sort of affectionate and tender Cruelties, such as God himself represents to us by his Prophet, (*Isai.* liv.) *In a little Wrath I hid my Face from thee for a moment, but with Everlasting Kindness will I have Mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.*

Now this Manner of Proceeding manifestly shews us, what Notions we ought to entertain of Salvation, and the mighty Consequence of it to us; since hence we perceive, that nothing is of any consideration in God's Esteem, which is not Eternal. All other Matters are made subservient to that one great Concern, and even contemptible in comparison of it. He raised and preserved *Pharaoh* upon his Throne, that by the

humbling that proud obſtinate Sinner, he might make his Power to be known in the *Iſraelites* Deliverance. And many times the Mighty are exalted, not ſo much for their own ſakes, as for the advantage of the Humble and Meek. Thus Publick Deſolations, overturning of Kingdoms, bringing down the Princes and Powers of the Earth, and the moſt general Miſchiefs, which we are uſed to feel or fear in our perſonal or politick Capacities, are a very ſmall matter in God's account. Man's only true Intereſt is the Intereſt of his Soul and another Life; and the weightieſt Affairs of this World, even the Government of Kingdoms, and all the Grandeurs Mortal Men are capable of, ſhould only be valued by him, ſo far as they may become inſtrumental to his Honour and higher Elevation in Heaven. Ah! did we ſeriouſly believe theſe Truths, we ſhould not be ſo tenderly affected with the Afflictions and Reproaches of the World, nor ſo unreaſonably fond of its falſe Pleaſures, and periſhing Enjoyments. Our Hearts and every Deſire of our Souls would then be fix'd on no other Object but Heaven, becauſe we muſt be ſenſible, that this is the only Object worthy the Hopes and eager Wiſhes of them, who are Chriſtians indeed.

This Importance is capable of yet farther Illuſtration, by conſidering that Miniſtry of

of the Angels, which God makes uſe of for promoting the Salvation of Mankind. For the Scripture acquaints us, that theſe Divine Spirits, the nobleſt and moſt perfect of all created Beings, *are yet ſent forth as Miniſtring Spirits, to Miniſter for Them who ſhall be Heirs of Salvation*, (Heb. i. 14.) And, tho' their common Employment be thought to conſiſt in regulating the Courſe of the Stars, diſtinguiſhing the Seaſons, moving the ſecret Springs by which this great Machine of the World is acted, and aſſiſting in the conſtant Adminiſtration of Nature in general; yet do they hold no part of their Buſineſs more noble, more worthy their native Excellence, or think themſelves at any time better employed, than when they are appointed Guardians and Centinels to particular Chriſtians, and ſo far imitate their great Maſter, who came into the World for no other purpoſe, but purely to lay himſelf out upon Man's Salvation.

Another thing, which ought to raiſe our Eſteem for this Salvation, is that mighty and continual Watchfulneſs, ſo earneſtly preſs'd by our Saviour in the Goſpel. For how many figurative Expreſſions are made uſe of there, to make us ſenſible of the very urgent Neceſſity, which lyes upon us, to proſecute this Affair, which yet cannot be finiſhed without ſuch ſtrict, ſuch indiſpen-

ſable Application? Thoſe Parables of the *Talents*, The *Marriage-Feaſt*, The *Wiſe and Fooliſh Virgins*, The *Labourers in the Vineyard*, The *unfaithful Servant caſt into utter Darkneſs*, The *Steward accuſed of Waſting his Maſter's Goods*; And all thoſe other Repreſentations ſo uſual in the Goſpel, are ſo many Admonitions from our Lord to every Chriſtian, obliging him to Watch without ceaſing, to keep a ſtrong Guard over himſelf, and to remit no part of that Diligence, which ſo great an Undertaking requires. For, beſides that God hath his particular Seaſons, and favourable Opportunities, for doing Men good, which it behoves them narrowly to obſerve, that they may not ſlip by loſt and unimproved: we muſt remember, that Death comes like a Thief in the Night, and Woe be to us if we be ſurprized aſleep. To this we may add the extreme Hazard and Danger of a Life expoſed to continual Storms, and a Thouſand other Conſiderations, which ought to engage us in a moſt indefatigable Diligence. In ſhort: The Time draws on; The Life of Man is but of ſhort continuance; The firſt Step he takes in it, is an Advance towards Death; The Track of an Arrow ſhot in the Air; The Flight of a Bird; The Scudding of a Veſſel before the Wind; Such are the Images painting to us the Swiftneſs of our Motion through this

this World, (*Wisd.* v. 10, 11, 12.) The Day is now broke upon us, but the Night presses forward apace. *Yet a little while* (says our blessed Saviour, *John* xii. 35.) *is the Light with you; walk while ye have the Light, lest Darkness come upon you.* And that terrible Hour of Death, which determins our State for all Eternity, hath Horrour enough in it to make the best Men tremble; when they reflect upon the absolute Holiness, the inflexible Justice of God, and the depth of those Judgments, which are so full of Wonder, so very different from the Judgments of frail and sinful Men, and therefore so little to be understood by us.

But after all; Nothing does so demonstratively prove the vast Importance of this Affair, as the great Things, which the Son of God hath condescended to do and suffer for Our Salvation. He was content, not only to appear an Object of Contempt in the Eyes of Men, by leading a Life of Meekness, and Poverty; but, that he might bear the utmost Rigour of the extreme Malediction, which our Offences had incurred, he was content to take upon him the Representation of our Guilt too; and to appear in the likeness of *sinful* Flesh. And here what shall I say, what rather shall I need to say, of the Humiliations he underwent, and how he *emptied himself*, both in the Afflictions of his Life, and in the Shame and

and Tortures of his Death? Now we have all the Reaſon in the World to believe, that He, who is the infallible and eſſential Wiſdom of God the Father, would not have had recourſe to Methods ſo extraordinary, ſo aſtoniſhing, ſo unparallell'd, if the Deſign carried on by them had not deſerved all this Expence. Hence, without queſtion it is, that the Prophet, mentioning our Saviour's Paſſion, calls it the *Revealing*, or the *Making Bare the Arm of the Lord*, (Iſai. lii, liii.) intimating hereby, that it was the nobleſt and greateſt Work of Omnipotence it ſelf. The utmoſt Strength and Virtue whereof, St. *Paul* tells us, he hath wiſely concealed, under the ſeeming Weakneſs of his Death, (1 *Cor.* i.) that Humane Wiſdom might be evidently convicted of having no part in this glorious Work. And how glorious muſt it be indeed, how infinite the Conſequence of that Salvation, which was thought a fit Purchaſe for the Blood and Death of God!

Again, This Importance does not only declare it ſelf by the incomprehenſible Myſteries and Miracles, which God hath vouchſafed to work for the Salvation of Man; but likewiſe by the End or Conſequence of theſe Things upon Us; which are ſo very terrible, that nothing leſs than an Eternity of Torments, or an Eternity of Bliſs and Glory muſt be the certain Fate of

of each of us at laſt. Eternity! O bleſſed God! Thou, who alone canſt meaſure its extent, help me to conceive it. For our Souls are too narrow to entertain a juſt Idea of Rewards and Puniſhments, without Meaſure, and without End. Oh the Heighth, and Depth, and Length, and Breadth of Eternity! how far they exceed the utmoſt Range of Thought! O Death! how great a Concern art Thou to us! Thou, which muſt determin our Fate, and fix us in One of thoſe unalterable Extremes! And what Application then, what Caution, what Watchfulneſs can be too great, to prepare us for the Deciſion of ſo very great an Iſſue! For ſurely That which muſt of neceſſity come to an End, is not worthy to be compared with That, which never can be ſubject to Change or Concluſion. And then, how lamentable is the Folly of thoſe thoughtleſs Men, who hazard Eternity, for a Pleaſure that dies in an Inſtant; nay indeed, who, upon any the moſt plauſible account, are content to loſe an Endleſs Kingdom, for the preſervation of a Life, that laſts but for a Moment? To be ſhort: The Salvation of Mankind is to be ſure of great Concern, becauſe This is the only Work of God deſigned to endure always. For all his other Productions ſhall be deſtroyed, *Heaven and Earth ſhall paſs away*, and all the *Elements ſhall be diſſolved and burnt up*; but that

that bleſſed Eternity, reſerved for the Chriſtian's Recompence, ſhall never paſs away. This is that glorious Maſter-piece, not of the Wiſdom of Man, or of this World, but entirely God's own, which St. *Paul* preached, (1 *Cor.* ii. 7.) even *that hidden Wiſdom, which God ordained before the World unto our Glory; Which none of the Princes of this World knew, and of which it is written, Eye hath not ſeen, nor Ear heard, neither have entred into the Heart of Man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

I might enforce the former Conſiderations, by adding the almoſt inſuperable Difficulties, that beſet us in our Way to Heaven. I might ſet before Men an Image of that dreadful Tribunal, where we muſt all be judged; The Extremity of God's Vengeance, and the Severity of his Examination and Judgment. I might ſhew, what Precipices there lye on each Side this narrow Way; what falſe Paths to miſlead us; and how full of Hazard our Voyage is, through a Sea full of Rocks, and Quick-ſands, and frequent Shipwracks: I might urge the Uncertainty of Life, the ſudden Surpriſe of Death, whereof every Day convinces us by ſad Experience, and moſt deplorable Examples; For, alas! after how uncomfortable a manner do the generality of Chriſtians go out of the World? I might make Men ſenſible, what Enemies they have

to

to deal with, how many, how powerful, how hard to be withſtood ſucceſsfully; how formidable the Prince of Darkneſs is to the Children of Light; what Snares that lying Spirit lays for us; how full of Artifice, and Cheat, and Diſguiſe to impoſe upon us; The Levity and Weakneſs of our own Heart in the whole Courſe of this tireſome Journy; while the World is perpetually fighting, and beating down our good Reſolutions from without, and our own Paſſions as inceſſantly rebelling and undermining us within. I might preſs our Saviour's Warning, that we ſhould *ſtrive* the more vehemently *to enter in at the ſtrait Gate*, becauſe *few there be that go in thereat.* And laſtly, I might enlarge upon that Myſtery of Predeſtination, by which God deſtributes the Means, and Opportunities, and Aſſiſtances of his Graces, at ſuch Times, in ſuch Meaſures, and to ſuch Perſons, as he ſees fit; that Myſtery, in which St. *Paul* and St. *Auguſtin* have laboured to ſuch excellent purpoſe, for the vindication of the Mercy, and the Juſtice of God, and the Freedom of his Grace. And happy is that Chriſtian, who can with ſuch becoming Modeſty contemplate this Myſtery, as to admire the deep Counſels of the moſt High; to comfort himſelf in his Wiſdom without abuſing his Goodneſs; and tremble at his Juſtice without diſtruſting his Mercy.

Againſt

Againſt the Rock of this Decree many unwary and unſtable Souls have ſplit. Chiefly, becauſe this Pride could not content it ſelf with continuing ignorant of things, which God hath made it impoſſible for mortal Man fully to know. May I avoid their dangerous Arrogance, and with profound Reverence adore the Mercies of my good God, without making bold Attempts to diſcover what he hath thought fit to conceal; or ſawcily intruding within that Veil, which He, to check our Preſumption and Curioſity, hath interpoſed on purpoſe to hide the Creator from his Creature's ſight.

Such are the Notions, ſuch the Eſtimate, which every Chriſtian ought to have of his Salvation: And ſuch in all reaſon have he muſt, did he but ſet himſelf to conſider, The Glory which God hath prepared for him, The wonderful Means made uſe of to redeem and qualifie him for it, And the Conſideration where all this muſt end at laſt; All which, if at all applied to Men's Conſciences, cannot but manifeſt to them the indiſpenſable Obligation every one lyes under, to conſider ſeriouſly of the Matter, and labour with all his Might to work out his Salvation. For that is the Effect I deſire from my former Diſcourſe, that this Affair alone may be thought, as it really is alone, Valuable and Great, and all beſides Deſpicable and Little. And, ſince the Son of

of God (as St. *Chryſoſtom* ſays) places his Honour and Glory in our Salvation; let us at leaſt think That our only Wiſdom, which he eſteems his greateſt Honour; and ſhew that we do ſo, by removing the Obſtructions to it, and acquainting our ſelves with the Means proper to that purpoſe.

CHAP. IV.

The Principal Obſtructions to this Great Work.

WHen once the Chriſtian is throughly perſwaded, how Important this Affair of Saving his Soul is, and, conſequent to that Perſwaſion, feels a true Deſire of effecting it; That Holy Wiſdom, which Fleſh and Blood hath not revealed, nor any Study or Humane Induſtry acquired, but the Grace of God only does or can infuſe into his Heart, this Wiſdom, I ſay, begins to caſt about for the beſt and ſafeſt Courſe, in a Way ſo thick beſet with Briars and Thorns, with Difficulties and Dangers. This is that Principle, mentioned by St. *James*, (Ch. iii.) which deſcending from above, enlightens the Underſtanding, purifies the Affections, and gives him a true Reliſh of God and Heavenly Things.

But

But we greatly miſtake the Matter, if we think This can be attained on a ſudden: It is a Perſwaſion bred by long Perſeverance in Goodneſs, by ſubſtantial Piety and tried Virtue; and the Fruit of that Wiſdom, which God teaches us by the outward Miniſtry of the Word, and impreſſes upon our Hearts by the inward Workings of his Divine Grace. For it is by no means ſufficient to our preſent purpoſe, that the Light of Faith, (which is the true Principle of Chriſtian Wiſdom) teach a Man, that all Temporal Things ought to be deſpiſed, and that ſuch only as are Eternal deſerve to be valued; unleſs it do withal inſpire that humble Vigilance, and zealous Circumſpection, requiſite for Them, whoſe Buſineſs it is to diſcover the true Way to Heaven, and decline all that may hinder our Progreſs in, or endanger the Miſleading and Turning us out of, it. By this Means only can we take right Meaſures, and make directly up to that Port, where we would be. For the Life of a Chriſtian in this World, is like a Ship upon an uncertain and dangerous Sea, it ſtands in need of continual Care; Its firſt Care then muſt be to take all Things out of the Way, which may obſtruct our Salvation; as in the management of worldly Buſineſs Men begin with clearing themſelves of their Impediments. But let us ſee what thoſe Things are,

are, which are moſt likely to embroil and intercept us in this Undertaking, that we may be the better able to provide againſt them.

I do not think it neceſſary upon this Occaſion to ſay any thing upon the Points of Infidelity, and Hereſie, and Schiſm. For though theſe are the moſt eſſential and formidable Obſtructions, yet I ſuppoſe my ſelf addreſſing to Perſons free of them, that is, to True Believers. All I ſhall add to this purpoſe, will be, that, according to the ordinary Methods of the Chriſtian Diſpenſation, no Salvation is to be had out of that truly Catholick Church, which is built upon the firm and immovable *Foundation of the Apoſtles and Prophets, Jeſus Chriſt himſelf being the chief Corner-ſtone*; Out of that Flock, which this good Shepherd feeds with his own Fleſh and Blood. It is a certain Truth, To hold and propagate Opinions contrary to this Church, and not to ſubmit to the Doctrins ſhe hath received and faithfully taught, is a thing the moſt oppoſite in the World to Salvation. For the only Way of being united to Jeſus Chriſt as our Head, is by keeping united to this myſtical Body of his, as Members of its Communion: And for Them, who exclude and ſeparate themſelves, they are the Stray-Sheep, that refuſe to hear and follow the Voice of the True Shepherd.

I. The First Obstacle then, which I shall insist upon is Pride; And such it must needs prove, since Fear, and a Distrust of our selves is the very * Groundwork on which Salvation must be built. Those natural Branches broken off to make way for grafting in the Branches of the wild Olive, which St. *Paul* hath so admirably descanted on, *Rom.* xi. The Jews, who were set aside to open a Passage for the Gentiles to come into the Church; because the Insolence of this People, once the peculiar Favourites of God, had forfeited the continuance of his Grace to them, ought to convince us, how great and fatal a Hindrance to being saved Presumption always is. For in truth the very Character of a Believer consists in Submission and Lowliness of Mind. It is a mighty Mistake to suppose, that Quaintness of Reasoning is necessary to Salvation, or that Men are expected to give a distinct and full Account of every Article of Faith. Men are not saved by Subtlety of Discourse, but by the Simplicity and Honesty of Belief. The Light from Heaven can only guide us in our Way thither, the *Ignes Fatui* of this World can do us no Service in this Passage. God only can shew us the Way, and assist us in it; *It is not in Man that walketh* (as the Prophet observes, *Jer.* x. 23.) *to direct* his own Steps.

* *Timor Salutis fundamentum est; Præsumptio impedimentum*, Tertul.

Steps. Penetration and Judgment ſanctifie no Man. This is the Work of Humility and Innocence. For *ye ſee your Calling, Brethren*, ſays St. *Paul*, *how that not many wiſe Men after the Fleſh, not many Mighty, not many Noble are called; But God hath choſen the Fooliſh Things of the World to confound the Wiſe; and the Weak Things of the World to confound the Things which are Mighty, That no Fleſh ſhould glory in his Preſence*, (1 Cor. 1. 27, 29.) and that the wiſe Men of this World might be left in, and convinced of, their real Folly. Thus it was that the Jews undid themſelves; by preſuming upon the ſuppoſed Righteouſneſs of their own Works, and growing vain and inſolent upon this Suppoſition. The meek and humble Converſation of Jeſus, his ignominious Death and Sufferings gave them offence; and *thus they ſtumbled and fell at that Stone of ſtumbling*, as the Apoſtle obſerves. For ſuch they rendred him to themſelves, by being ſcandalized at the mighty Condeſcenſions of his Divine Love. Pride made them ingrateful, and Ingratitude provoked God to reject them. For He, *who giveth Grace to the Humble*, ſets his Face againſt the Proud; by overſpreading their Hearts with thick Darkneſs, and turning that Wiſdom into Folly, the preſumptive Vanity of which he deſigns to puniſh. *Thoſe Branches* (ſays St. *Paul*) *were broken off, becauſe of their Unbelief;*

belief; and Thou ſtandeſt by Faith. Be not then high-minded but fear, (Rom. xi. 20.) For, if God ſhewed himſelf ſo ſevere to his own favourite People, if he did not ſpare the natural Branches of that Tree, which exalted it ſelf againſt him, *take heed leſt he alſo ſpare not Thee.* Let us not therefore abuſe and injure our ſelves with any falſe Confidence in our own Merits; The beſt and moſt blameleſs Converſation, if allayed with Arrogance, is a greater Bar to Grace and Salvation, than great Guilt with Humility proportionable; And the Sinner, who wholly diſtruſts himſelf, and caſts his Confidence upon the Mercy of God, is more pleaſing to him, than the haughty Phariſaical Righteous.

Let us then humble our ſelves before God, that we may be accounted worthy of his Grace: Let us not depend upon our Senſes, which Faith hath commanded to be ſilent in theſe Matters, as Things too far above them; Let us not wander after our own private Opinions, to forſake the Doctrine of the Goſpel and the Chriſtian Church; But be humble and teachable, remembring that Submiſſion is the great thing Faith requires of us. Its Myſteries are ſo aſtoniſhing, that, even after their Accompliſhment, Submiſſion is neceſſary to the Belief of them. When we take upon our ſelves to be our own Guides, we ſhall go aſtray;

aſtray; when Reaſon is made the Standard of every Point, and the Authority of Revelation diſputed, Ruine and Deſtruction will be the End of it: For God confounds the Proud in their own Errours, and puniſhes their voluntary, with a judicial, Darkneſs. Thus he dealt with the Jews, who bore themſelves high upon their own Righteouſneſs; and it was an exemplary Inſtance of his Juſtice to caſt off an arrogant Generation, and take another more meek and obedient into Favour. Let us then avoid Their Crime, that we may eſcape Their Puniſhment. To truſt in our own Holineſs, is in effect to be a Jew. The Chriſtians ſafeſt courſe, is to fear always; to work with trembling; to ſuſpect and abſolutely diſtruſt himſelf; to place his hope and confidence entirely in the Mercy of a Forgiving God; and thus we ſhall keep clear of the firſt great Obſtacle to Salvation, which is Pride.

II. The Second is a Worldly Mind; A Spirit of Pleaſure and Effeminacy, of Luxury and Wantonneſs, of Vanity and Ambition, of Project and Intrigue, of criminal Engagements and Paſſions, of Treachery and Diſguiſe; and all the other Vices, which make Mens Diſpoſitions and Practices irregular, and tend to Debauchery and a general Diſſoluteneſs of Manners. For, from the Inſtant that Men are in-

intoxicated with the Sweets of the World, their Reliſh for God and Heaven droops and decays; ſo that, conſidering the Conſequence, a Man cannot hold Correſpondence with theſe ſenſual Delights, and ſtill preſerve his Innocence. I ſpeak not of the World in general, that corrupt part of it where Love of Pleaſure is the Reigning Principle; that reprobate part for which our Saviour forebore to pray, (*Joh.* xvii. 9.) though he diſdained not to intercede for thoſe very Wretches that crucified him. 'Tis true, The Splendour and gaudy Outſide is apt to dazle our Sight; this debauches our Judgment, and diſpoſes us to take Counterfeit for Truth, and Shadows for Subſtance, as it tempts us again to deſpiſe Reality and Excellence, for Emptineſs and Trifle. Time, which flies ſwiftly from theſe Men, affects them; Eternity with all its Perfections can make no impreſſion; and a Little in preſent Poſſeſſion contents them better than the largeſt Hopes and firmeſt Aſſurances in Reverſion only. But ſince this falſe Luſtre will quickly vaniſh, ſince even the whole Scheme of this World diſappears like a Vapour, let us be before-hand with it, and undeceive our ſelves betimes. Let us decline the World, and the Children of the World, and, as little as may be, come within the corrupt Air they breathe; for all about is infectious, and

and we cannot converſe with them, but to the prejudice of our Virtue. A gay Lady, for inſtance, let her Behaviour otherwiſe be never ſo blameleſs, and her Conduct never ſo diſcreet, yet contracts a Soil, by thoſe very Inclinations to Vanity, which ſhe cheriſhes, in labouring to recommend her Perſon, and affecting to be admired. It is to no purpoſe to pretend to Purity in the midſt of Corruption, or promiſe our ſelves Safety in the midſt of Pleaſure and Temptation. This contagious Breath of the World is a great Obſtruction to Goodneſs; and thoſe Airs and Modes People engage in by converſing and complying with the World, poyſon the Mind by degrees, and taint all that come within the Sphere of their Venom. Now to avoid this danger, we ſhall do well to imitate that Holy Biſhop, who wrote his Friend word, That * the *World was now grown too groſs to put upon him any longer*; *And if we* (ſays he) *would leave off cheating our ſelves, it would not be in the power of the World to cheat us.* So perfectly was this good Man aware of the Falſhood and Treachery of the World, and all its ſubtle Artifices to deceive us. We read in the † Lives of the Fathers, That

* Vix jam habet mundus ut fallat; Periit illa imago rerum ad decipiendum uſque decora; Niſi noſmet ipſos decipimus pæne mundus decipere non poteſt. *Ruther. ad Valer.*

† *Ruffin. in Vit. Patr. l. 2.*

Macarius, passing the River *Nile*, converted a Gentleman by one single Sentence, which opened his Eyes, and convinced him at once, of the true State and Value of Things. *We* (says he) *who have devoted our selves to God, laugh at the Folly of the World, and despise it; and the World despises and makes Fools of You, who give your selves up to it. Love not then the World, neither the Things that be in the World*, according to St. *John*'s Advice to his Disciples, for *If any Man love the World, the Love of the Father is not in Him.* Help us then, O our God, in this distress; break the Chains that entangle and fasten us down to the World, and hinder our advancing in the Way which Thou hast shewed, to lead us to thy Self. Scatter this Thick Cloud, and take off the Scales of Vanity and Self-love from before our Eyes, which put out false Lights, and turn us out of our right Path. For after all; This mighty Lustre and Grandeur of the World is but a Bubble, a meer Nothing; and God when he intends to punish these great Sinners who despise him, needs no severer Method, than the leaving them destitute in all that Emptiness and Want, which they have so foolishly preferred before the Light of his Wisdom, and the Riches of his Goodness.

III. A Third Obstruction in this Matter, which hath indeed great affinity with that last

laſt mentioned, is Proſperity. When *David* became victorious over his Enemies; and had gained quiet Poſſeſſion of the Throne, then he fell ſo foully into Sin. Succeſs betrayed him to Idleneſs and Effeminacy; and he was never undone, till he thought himſelf abſolutely ſafe. For Proſperity is the Rock, upon which great Souls are moſt apt to ſplit, becauſe it begets Levity, and Inconſtancy, and diſpoſes Men to lay aſide that Seriouſneſs and Caution, which Circumſtances of another kind make neceſſary to them. When a Man is grown Succeſsful and lives at his Eaſe, he begins to be fond of Life; and loath at any rate to quit a Condition, which at the beſt is but a Shadow of Death, a Valley of Tears, a Priſon, where we are hemm'd in with Miſeries on every ſide. And, in regard that Greatneſs, and Plenty, and Power, breed in Men a fatal Remiſſneſs, and Diſregard of Chriſtianity and a future State, they cannot but be a terrible Hindrance in our Way to Salvation. I would not be miſtaken, as if this Obſtruction were neceſſary and in the very nature of the thing: For *David*, and *Abraham*, and *Conſtantine*, and ſeveral other great Perſons, we have reaſon to conclude, are now glorified Saints. But in the Event it is ſo; and, morally ſpeaking, 'tis exceeding difficult to be Great, and not corrupted by Greatneſs: and to be

Rich, and not make an ill Uſe of Riches. A more than ordinary Proportion of Grace, great Moderation and Temper, and a Virtue above the common Standard are required, to keep ſuch Perſons within the Bounds of their Duty. Leſs than this will not ſuffice to preſerve Innocence and Proſperity together. *Tertullian* found ſome difficulty to conceive the Power of this World, and the Reſignation of a Chriſtian, meeting in the ſame Perſon. And it is one of the Miracles peculiar to our Religion, that it inſpires the Honourable with Modeſty, and the Succeſsful with ſtrict Juſtice. Many a Man is ruined by Plenty and Promotion, who would have been happy for ever, if he had contiued in a meaner Station. While Honour and Riches exalt the Mind, all the Admonitions to Holineſs, and the moſt concerning Truths of the Goſpel are loſt upon it. And where will all this mighty Pomp end at laſt? The greateſt Prince is but like an Actor upon the Stage. When the Play is at an End, and Death ſhuts the Scene, all is over; and what refined Madneſs would it be, for any Chriſtian for ſo ſhort an Enjoyment, to forego the true Greatneſs and durable Glories of Eternity? Fame hath perhaps ſounded your Name all the World over; and Mankind have been aſtoniſhed at your good Fortune; Your Ambition hath advanced you to the higheſt Pitch

Pitch of Honour; This is your Case to Day; but to Morrow you shall die, and what becomes of you then? What will you do to all Eternity, if in this Span of Time you have forgotten God, and violated your own Conscience? To be short; Prosperity carries a secret Poyson in it, which taints all other Means of Salvation to that degree, that ordinarily they become of little or no effect. The Calls of Grace to the Christian Faith; The Seal of Baptism; The Use of the Sacraments; The Exhortations from the Pulpit; Your own Prayers; Your Natural Probity of Mind, and all your other hopeful Qualities, lose their force, and are defeated, when they meet with great Honours, and great Riches. For, besides that these commonly vitiate the Affections, the Hardship is increased by their Contrariety to the Christian Religion: For This is of a quite different Temper; a Profession of Humility, and Suffering, and Poverty of Spirit. Hence the wise Man observes, that God often *gives Men Riches to their Hurt*; He distributes the Wealth of This World to the Proud and Covetous, and reserves the Treasures of the Next for the Lowly and Meek. He appoints Humiliation and Trouble for his Friends, the better to fit them for Glory with himself; and leaves Honour and Plenty for Reprobates: These things he deals

promiſcuouſly, and often ſuffers the worſt of Men to enjoy them, in the midſt of their Impieties. But then This is the whole of Their Portion; and the Severity of his Juſtice is laid up for Them, who here deſpiſe the Abundance of his Mercy.

IV. The Fourth Obſtruction is that Lukewarmneſs of Soul reproved by the Angel in the Revelation (Ch. iii.) as a Diſpoſition, the moſt directly oppoſite of any to the Buſineſs of Salvation. For This, in the midſt even of the moſt religious Duties, caſts in a ſort of Diſreliſh, which cools Mens Zeal for true Happineſs; It dries up all that *Unction of the Holy One* diffuſed in the Soul; It deſtroys the Fear of God, and the tendereſt Reſentments of Piety and Devotion; And it renders all Inſtructions ineffectual, by putting a ſtop to the Practice of them. Men by this Indifference grow ſo exceeding remiſs, that they fall off from all that Senſe of Virtue, which formerly they had; They begin to queſtion what heretofore they moſt firmly believed; They decline all Pains; and dread all appearance of Difficulty; They take no care to ſubdue themſelves; but ſhut their Eyes againſt their Duty, and ſtifle all the Light of Grace within them. This is the Condition of the lukewarm Chriſtian, infinitely worſe than perfect Coldneſs and Averſion; becauſe a Sinner may be brought to a conviction of

his

his Danger, but the lukewarm Professor will not be made sensible of his: And this languishing sort of Zeal, while there is Life left, is worse than an absolute Death in Trespasses and Sins. For it is Indifference, which quenches that Fervour of Zeal so absolutely necessary for waging a constant War with a Man's Desires, and the violent Conflicts by which Heaven is taken by force. This makes Virtue distastful, and Vice a Matter of no consequence; and lays aside those Guards and that holy Watchfulness, which the Gospel recommends as things without which Salvation is never to be attained. For since we are always in danger, and beset thick with Ambuscades of Enemies in every Step we take, there is great and indispensable occasion, for being always upon our Guard. Every thing combines against the Christian, (as St. *Leo* truly observes) and the Moment he ceases to fight, he loses the Day. The Peace he makes with his Enemy is of more fatal consequence than the hottest Engagement; and when the Weather seems fair, his Danger is more than in the roughest Sea. *Have a care* (says St. *Jerom*) *and abate no part of your Diligence, upon a vain presumption, that you are safe; for*

Plena sunt omnia periculis, plena laqueis; invitant cupiditates, insidiantur illecebræ. Leo Serm. 5. in Quadr.

Timent in sereno pati tempestatem. *Hier. l. 2. com. Pel.*

Nolite esse securi: ista tranquillitas tempestas est. *Hier. ad Hel.*

a Calm to a Christian is a sort of Storm, from which few escape. Now if he that stops in the middle of the Race; If he *that looks behind him, after he hath put his Hand to the Plough*, Luke ix. 62. If He that hath begun this great Work, and slackens his Pains and Resolution, though never so little, is not thought fit for the Kingdom of God, what will become of Them, who by a wretched Negligence desert the Post in which Providence hath placed them; and throw off the Engagements in which they had bound themselves? This is in effect to break in upon God's Prerogative, to invert the Order and Method of your Salvation, and declare, that you will not follow God's Way, but your own. Let us then be careful and diligent to follow Him, if we desire to go right, and arrive safe at last; He is wiser than We; and knows better what Methods are proper for our Salvation, than our selves can possibly do: But let us excite in our Hearts that eager Appetite; that Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness, which our blessed Saviour prescribed to his Disciples, as a Means to quicken and sustain them in their painful Pursuits after Heaven and Happiness. Let us not, with that Disciple in the Gospel, pretend that we must first take care of Families and Concerns, before we can be at lei-

leiſure to follow Him. This Delay would argue but very cold Concern for Heaven. Let us remember, that He who deſired this Privilege of the Son of God, was left to his own fooliſh Choice and rejected, as a Perſon unqualified for his Diſcipleſhip. If we conſent to put off our good Reſolutions to a longer Day, the Enemy, who is always watching to deſtroy us, will find ſome opportunity to lay them quite aſide. And to Cure this Spiritual Lazineſs, ſo exceeding dangerous to the Soul, let us hearken with Fear and Trembling to thoſe horrible Threatnings, pronounced by the Angel againſt the Church of *Laodicea*, *Becauſe thou art lukewarm*, that is neither hot nor cold, but irreſolute and indifferent, *I will ſpue thee out of my Mouth.* So abominable is this Temper in the Sight of God, who will not, cannot, without ſome Expreſſions of Indignation and Grief, endure that any Chriſtian ſhould be thus unconcerned. And what indeed can be more provoking, than for Men to be ſo abſolutely void of care what becomes of them, after that God hath done ſo much to reſcue and redeem them?

Several other Obſtructions there are, eaſily reducible under the Heads now mentioned; ſuch as, ſecret Injuſtice, open and avowed Oppreſſion, Enmity and Hatred, Jealouſies and Piques; Murmuring and Envy, Calumny and Cenſoriouſneſs, and in a

word, Whatever elſe tends to break the Order and Peace, and diſſolve the Union and Love, of Chriſtians. Nor will I particularly inſiſt upon the general Voluptuouſneſs, the immoderate Love of Life, the many Vanities practiced and defended in this looſe Age; The Luxury and Laſciviouſneſs, and exorbitant Ambition, of the Great; whoſe Heads are full of nothing elſe but Projects and Intrigues to ſettle and enjoy themſelves here, without the leaſt proſpect or thought of any Future State. Theſe are in ſuch direct oppoſition to Salvation, that the Sacraments and other Means of Grace which Men pretend to uſe, without correcting theſe vicious Inclinations, do but provoke God ſo much the more. But That which is of more dreadful Conſideration than all the reſt, and gave St. *Paul* all that Terrour and Aſtoniſhment, which he profeſs'd heretofore upon the Rejection of the Jews, is this, That Jeſus Chriſt himſelf, the greateſt and moſt miraculous of all other Means ordained to this Purpoſe, became to that People the greateſt of all Obſtructions, by the extreme Blindneſs of their Obſtinacy and Pride. For the Meanneſs of that Appearance he made, while converſing upon Earth, gave them ſo great Offence, that they rather choſe to revolt from all the Declarations of the Law and Prophets concerning

cerning the Meſſias, than ſubmit to the Goſpel ſo preached: They renounced the Father, becauſe they reſolved not to believe the Son. This was what *Iſaiah* had long before declared would be, *He that ſhall be your Sanctification, ſhall be alſo a Stone of Stumbling, and a Rock of Offence to both the Houſes of Iſrael, and a Snare to all the Inhabitants of Jeruſalem*, (Ch. viii. 14.) (*Qui erit vobis in ſanctificationem.* Vulg.) Now what was thus verified in Their Caſe, is ſo likewiſe in moſt Accidents of Humane Life. There is ſcarce any one Diſpenſation of Providence, which may not be a powerful Inſtrument of Salvation, and yet by being abuſed it may be converted into as great an Obſtacle againſt it. *David* grew better by a Crown, and *Saul* was ruined by it. The Phariſee returned from the Temple worſe than he went up to it, and the vile Publican came back juſtified to his Houſe. Theſe different Succeſſes caſt the Apoſtle into ſuch aſtoniſhment, to conſider, how very differently God works upon the Minds of Men, by the very ſame Opportunities, and the ſame Means.

Theſe are the Hindrances to our Salvation: The Cauſe whereof it is uſual with Men to charge upon God, without conſidering, as they ought, that the things themſelves, which are the Occaſions only of Virtue and Vice, are indeed from God; but

but the abuſe of theſe things is entirely from our ſelves. *For* (as the Prophet ſays) *the Hand of the Lord is not ſhortned, that it cannot ſave, nor his Ear heavy, that it cannot hear; But our Iniquities ſeparate between us and our God, and our Sins hide his Face from us, that he will not hear; For your Hands are defiled with Blood, your Lips have ſpoken Lies, and your Tongue uttered perverſe things,* (Iſai. lix. 1, 2, 3.) That is, His Grace is ever able and preſent to render all our Events of good effect to thoſe who comply with it; but to the wicked and obſtinate, he does moſt juſtly turn *what ſhould have been for their wealth into an occaſion of falling.* The following part of that Chapter in the Prophet, is an Abridgment of the ſeveral Impediments to Salvation. But, having already ſeen what I conceive ſufficient for my preſent Deſign, let us now proceed to try if we can diſcover the Means moſt likely to contribute towards it.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

The Means of Salvation, and the Uſe we ought to make of them.

THE Mind of Man is too narrow to comprehend by its own Strength the Way of Salvation. God alone can teach it, and He muſt be conſulted for Directions to walk in the Way of his own appointing. His Directions, according to the Prophet's Advice, (*Iſai.* viii. 20.) are to be ſought only in the Laws he hath given us. Let us therefore attend to Him, and to Thoſe who teach us by Commiſſion from Him, without amuſing our ſelves with the vain Reaſonings of Fleſh and Blood, whoſe Wiſdom reaches no farther than to preſent Objects. And, ſince Eternity is the Matter in hand, let us go to the *Father Everlaſting*, and the Prince, of whoſe *Kingdom there ſhall be no End.* He is the Light of Life, and all other Lights lead only to Death. His Life and Death, His Doctrine and Examples are the Holy Inſtructions, by which he gives Men *knowledge of Salvation.* And what hath he done to this purpoſe? We were in Darkneſs, and he hath called us into his marvellous Light. He hath created us again by Baptiſm to Innocence and Good-works, and newneſs of Life: We were afar off, and He hath

hath made us nigh by the Blood of the Croſs; Nay, All the Works of his Hands were therefore made, that they might become Inſtruments of Salvation. The mute Parts of the Creation yet ſpeak of Him loudly; The Heavens declare his Glory, and call upon Men to aſpire to a Participation of it: And nothing upon Earth is ſo vile or common, but it may furniſh Means of promoting our Holineſs here, and Happineſs hereafter.

Nature in its moſt ſilent State teaches Man diſtinctly what muſt be his End; and the very Dead preach to us our own Mortality, more powerfully than the Living can poſſibly do. Heaven and Earth, Sickneſs and Health, Natural and Moral Philoſophy, Evil Report and Good Report, Riches and Poverty, our Sufferings and our Comforts, Life and Death, are ordained by Providence for Means of Profiting our Souls. And from all that happens, all the variety of Caſualties our Condition is expoſed to, from Mens Succeſſes and Diſappointments, their Friendſhips, their Inclinations, their Sympathies, their ſeveral Callings and Buſineſs in the World, ſomething of Benefit may be gathered. For there is not any of all theſe but hath a ſecret Virtue and Tendency toward that one great Ordinance of God, the Glorifying of his Faithful Servants. As Men of Skill tame

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the moſt Savage Beaſts, to make them ſerviceable for their occaſions, ſo a prudent Chriſtian will correct the moſt capricious Humour, and ſoften the ruggedeſt Diſpoſition, that it ſhall be gentle and tractable in the practice of Virtue. The wiſe Man makes good profit of Grief, and Poverty, and Diſgrace, and all the other Difficulties and Diſtreſſes of Humane Life; and by the Addreſs of Philoſophy and good Management keeps himſelf eaſie in the Affairs of the World. And ſhall not a Chriſtian much more, with the Aſſiſtances of Divine Grace, be able to convert Sufferings and preſent Adverſities into Inſtruments and Occaſions of his future Happineſs in Heaven? It is the Creatour's Intention, that we ſhould come to him by the help of the Creatures. But Sin hath ſo depraved the Judgment of wretched Man; and our Enemy ſcatters ſo great a quantity of Tares among the good Seed; and We our ſelves are ſo carried away with the Inconſtancy of our Deſires, and the Corruption of our Nature, that the diſcreet Uſe which ought to be made of theſe Means, is incumbred with almoſt invincible Difficulties. For, as in natural Advantages, that which is good for one Man, is ſtark naught for another;

Sapienti non necetur a paupertate non a dolore, non ab aliis vitæ tempeſtatibus; Bonorum rector, malorum victor; Tu illum premiputas; Malis ſuis utitur. Senec. ad Lucil.

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As ſtrong Meats are proper for healthful Stomachs, but hurtful to tender and ſickly Conſtitutions; and Wine, which cheers and fortifies the Healthful, weakens and overpowers the Feeble; So in moral Means, that which makes One a good Man, does but confirm and harden Another in Vice. That Praiſe, which renders the Modeſt more Humble, blows up the Preſumptuous and Conceited with Vanity. And the ſame Wealth, which ſanctifies the charitable Man's Plenty to him, corrupts the Covetous and Profuſe. This is what we are highly concern'd to know and obſerve; and in this Skill of making the beſt of every Accident it is, *that the Children of this World are* ſaid to be *wiſer, in Their Generation, than the Children of Light*; Becauſe they make choice of ſuch Methods only as are proper for compaſſing the Ends they deſign them to ſerve. And this is the Firſt Quality of a Means to be applied to its proper purpoſe.

II. A Second Quality is This, That no Means are Good in Themſelves, or Valuable by Us, any farther than in proportion to that Vertue they have of contributing to the End for which they are employed. If a Medicine conduces to the Patient's Health by its Bitterneſs, that Bitterneſs is the only Conſideration which renders it eligible. The North Wind is only deſirable

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to a Pilot, who is making Southward, by reaſon that cold freſh Gale favours his intended Voyage. Rain is no otherwiſe profitable to the dry barren Soil, than upon the account of that Moiſture, which fattens and makes the Ground fruitful. This Principle rightly underſtood, puts a new Face upon all Nature, in the Study and Practice of Morality; And by giving a Chriſtian other Proſpects, gives him at the ſame time a different Spirit and Temper. Hence it is, that Contradiction and Oppoſition become agreeable to him, becauſe they awaken his attention, and make him more diligent and zealous, more vigilant and circumſpect in the Concerns of his Soul. This renders Humiliation deſirable; becauſe a Man by that proceeds more ſafely in that rough ſtrait Way, which leads to Life. By the Force and Influence of this Perſwaſion it was, that *Moſes* ſo gallantly renounced the Pleaſures and Honours of *Egypt* for the Reproach of Jeſus Chriſt; and *choſe rather to ſuffer Affliction with the People of God, than to enjoy the Pleaſures of Sin* and worldly Greatneſs *for a Seaſon*, (Heb. xi. 25, 26.) Hence St. *Paul* and *Barnabas*, in their Travels through *Lycaonia*, preferred the Perſecution of the People of *Lyſtra*, before the Sacrifices and idolatrous Honours intended them by the Prieſt of *Jupiter*, (Acts xiv.) This hath made ſo many holy

holy Recluſes chuſe a private homely Cell, before the Splendour of a Court; and the Mortifications of a Devout and Penitent Life, before all the Delights of a Publick and Senſual One. This hath prevailed with Numbers of Perſons of the beſt Quality, to renounce the Delicacies of the World, and embrace the Humility and Poverty of the Goſpel; to deny themſelves many Enjoyments, of which their Condition gave them Opportunities and Abundance; becauſe they thought the Croſs of Chriſt, and the Reſerves of a holy Converſation, much more ſafe and effectual Means of obtaining that much more valuable Prize of Everlaſting Salvation.

III. A Third Quality of Means is this, That they muſt never ceaſe to be ſuch, by being eſteemed and ſought as ſomewhat above the Condition of Means. This would be to pervert the proper Uſe of them, by fixing our Deſires in them as our End; and to fall into that horrible Confuſion and Diſorder, which St. *Auguſtin* mentions, as the moſt general Cauſe of all the Extravagance and Corruption of Manners obſervable in the World. Which is *to Uſe thoſe things which were made for Enjoyment, and to Enjoy thoſe which ought to be Uſed only* *. This proceeds from that depraved Self-love, by the Byaſs whereof a Man is drawn

* Omnis humana perverſio fruendis uti velle, & utendis frui. *Aug. l. octog. Qu.* 30.

drawn to value the Creature more than the Creatour; and ſo utterly to invert that wiſe and proper Order, in which God eſtabliſhed things at firſt. Hence the ambitious Man looks upon the Honour he is in ſuch greedy purſuit of, as his End; in the Enjoyment of which Happineſs conſiſts: Hence the Covetous bears greater regard to Intereſt than Conſcience; and the voluptuous Man is more concerned for the Gratification of his Senſes, than the Saving of his Soul. This turned an Archangel into a Devil, becauſe Vanity and Pride made the Satisfaction he coveted; and the Firſt Man, from being Maſter, became a Slave, to the Creatures, by the ſame Irregularity in his Affections. As a Puniſhment for this Folly, that haughty King of *Babylon*, who laboured to exalt himſelf above all that is Humane, by commanding his Statue to be honoured with Proſtrations and Divine Worſhip, was thruſt down to the level of the Beaſts: And thoſe Philoſophers mentioned by St. *Paul*, (Rom. i.) who profeſs'd and conceited themſelves wiſe, became Fools, through the Pride and Errour of their Minds. And if we do but at all reflect upon the Excellence of God, there needs but very little conſideration to convince us, that preferring Intereſt, or Pleaſure, or any other thing before Him, muſt needs be a Breach of that Order and Eternal Reaſon, which

which he hath ſettled in the World; a Uſurping what belongs not to Us, Robbery to God, and Ruine to our Selves: For which reaſon the Scripture mentions the alienating our Affections from Him under Terms of the baſeſt and moſt unpardonable Unfaithfulneſs; *For lo! they that forſake thee ſhall periſh, thou ſhalt deſtroy all them that commit Fornication againſt thee*, (Pſalm lxxiii. 27.)

Now the Chriſtian, whoſe Mind is enlightned by Faith, looks upon God alone as his Ultimate End; and upon all other Creatures, as ſo many Means only, or as it were Steps, by which Men make their Approaches to Him. Theſe therefore he values in a juſt proportion, as they conduce more or leſs to this End. For Faith, from whence he takes his Meaſures, diſcovers to him no Worth, or Merit, or real Goodneſs, in any of them, farther than they may prove Occaſions of Conducting him to God. And, in conſequence of this Rule, he looks upon them all with equal indifference. Riches or Poverty, Honour or Contempt, Health or Sickneſs, Pleaſure or Pain, Advancement or Degradation, Friendſhip or Deſertion, Parts or Slowneſs of Underſtanding, Proſperity or Diſgrace, Life or Death, all are alike to him. He ſees all Conditions with the ſame Temper, and is not by his Inclinations led to one more than another, till they come to be con-

conſidered as things that have a tendency to promote the Glory of God and his own Salvation; and in the ſame degrees that they excel each other in this reſpect, they riſe likewiſe in his eſteem above the reſt. He chuſes or declines them, as they are capable of ſetting him nearer, or detaining him farther off from, Heaven. He is entirely of the Traveller's Mind, whoſe only Care is to purſue his Journey, and therefore, when he meets with ſeveral Roads, his Heart is not ſet upon any one more than the reſt, till he be informed which of them leads to the Place whither he intends: And then he is not in any degree loath to quit the reſt, how beautiful ſoever the Way might appear. Nothing that is Temporal makes any great matter of Impreſſion upon the Spirit of a Chriſtian; The Evils and Sufferings he is threatned with from the World give him no Terrour, becauſe his Hope and Expectation is fixed upon thoſe good things only, which God promiſes in another World. The Glory of the Next Life inſpires him with Patience and Contentedneſs under all the Sufferings and Mortifications of the Preſent; and with a pure and ſtedfaſt Faith, he looks up to that God, who is (as the Apoſtle ſtyles him, *Heb.* xiii.) *the ſame Yeſterday, and to Day, and for Ever.* He conſiders, that this very God will be his Recompence, and the Changes of this World,

World, how grievous ſoever to Fleſh and Blood, will yet be well paid with Happineſs unchangeable.

Again; In the Judgment he makes concerning the Fitneſs and Efficacy of Means conducive to Salvation, he ſuffers not himſelf to be byaſs'd by the falſe Idea's of the Humane Underſtanding. For the Standard he weighs things by is not the arbitrary and uncertain Conjectures of Man's Reaſoning, but the ſubſtantial and fixt Determinations of Eternal Truth. He is indeed equally faithful in a Calm or in a Storm; Adverſity cannot drive him to Deſpondency, nor Proſperity puff him up with Inſolence and Forgetfulneſs of his Duty; Health makes him not preſume or grow bold in Sin, nor does Sickneſs provoke him to Impatience or one Murmuring Thought. But yet of the Two he likes Suffering better than Pleaſure, becauſe this brings him to a greater reſemblance of thoſe Elect and Bleſſed Saints, (mentioned in the Revelation, Ch. xiv. 4.) *who follow the Lamb whitherſoever he goeth*, to imitate his Example. And this having been His and Their Portion, the Conſiderate and Zealous Believer looks upon his Sufferings, as the ſureſt and ſafeſt Way to Salvation. He knows what the wiſe Man hath told us for our Comfort; that Good Men, after *having been a little chaſtiſed, ſhall be greatly rewarded*; for

for *God proves them*, he gives them Balm to their Wounds, and ſtrikes that he may *find them worthy for himſelf*. For *he tries them as Gold in the Fire, and receives them as a Burnt-offering*, when Tribulation hath ſanctified them, (*Wiſd.* iii. 5, 6.)

He is well-ſatisfied, that all Occaſions and Accidents are not of equal Importance to his great Work; but he is notwithſtanding exceeding cautious and watchful even in the leaſt Matters; He advances from Virtue to Virtue, and takes care to make no falſe Step in his Progreſs; for he keeps God ever in his Eye, as it is reaſonable he ſhould, ſince God's Eye is always upon Him, and nicely obſerves all his Actions. Thus, by deſpiſing the World and all it can pretend to, he arrives at the Excellence of thoſe *of whom* the Apoſtle ſays *the World was not worthy*; Greater than this whole viſible Frame, the Honours and Advantages whereof are to Day mounted upon a Throne, and to Morrow tumbled into a Coffin. And thus the Contempt of Earthly Enjoyments renders this Chriſtian fit for thoſe of Heaven.

The ſame Prudence, which teaches the Chriſtian to avoid the Wandrings and Blindneſs of the Whore of *Babylon*, to keep cloſe to the Strait Way of the Goſpel, teaches him likewiſe to make Juſt Diſtinctions in the Means conducing to Salvation, and to uſe them in ſuch a manner as is proper

per for the Nature and Qualifications of each of those Means. For of these Means some do us Service, only upon condition, that we use, and enjoy and are possess'd of them; Such are the Gifts of God, the Graces of his Spirit, the Instructions of his Word, the Benefit of his Sacraments. Others again do us no good, except only when we quit and disengage our selves from them; Such are Honour and Riches, and Pleasure. And a Third sort are of use to us no otherwise, than by the Advantages we receive from the Knowledge of them; because the Knowledge of These does by degrees exalt a Man higher, and bring him to the Knowledge of God. Now when the difference of these Circumstances is not duly observed, but the Order and Method of the Means perplex'd and confounded, the very best Means will lose their Efficacy, and degenerate into Impediments.

But, to be a little more particular in the direction of such Means, The Best and most Useful, no doubt, are Those, which the Saviour of the World hath himself pointed out to us in the Gospel; Such as Poverty of Spirit, Humiliation, Suffering, Simplicity, Silence, Teachableness, Patience, Prayer, and the like. And all these Ways to Heaven are the safer, in proportion as they are retired, and less exposed to view. For by this means Men are under covert from

from Temptations, and not ſo apt to be interrupted or oppoſed in their Paſſage to Almighty God. But the ſureſt Courſe of all is to Live up to the Perfection of our particular Profeſſion and Buſineſs, and to do our Duty in that State of Life unto which it hath pleaſed God to call us. For He is not confined, but hath great variety of Ways for bringing us to himſelf. We need only follow Him, for he will chuſe for us. And what particular Condition of Life ſoever his Providence hath appointed us to, for fulfilling the Duties of that Condition we are particularly Accountable, and ought to look upon That, as the Way he deſigns to lead us to Heaven by. When Mens Ambition renders them uneaſie, and fond of Change for Intereſt or Honour; Or when the Inconſtancy of their Humour will fix to nothing; This is a Fault, and a Refuſing to follow God in the Methods of his Providence. 'Tis in this Spiritual, as in Common Engagements, he that would be victorious over his Enemy, muſt fight in Rank and File, and diſcharge his proper Poſt. And to be ever ſhifting and reſtleſs, is to deſert in effect, and by ſtragling from the place our Commander hath aſſigned, to uſurp his Right, and turn our own Carvers. And, conſidering the fickle and buſie Minds of Chriſtians, who, inſtead of adorning their own Province, are eternally

graſping at ſomething more and higher, I tremble to think what a wretched Account the generality of People will be able to give of this Article at the laſt great Reckoning. Eſpecially, when I find St. *Paul* exhorting Chriſtians to ſo perfect a Reſignation to the Diſpoſals of Providence in theſe Matters, that he adviſes even Thoſe who were Slaves, not to care for or covet Freedom; and only to uſe it rather, if it were offered them, (1 *Cor.* vii.) And this for a very good reaſon, becauſe the Servant of Men is nevertheleſs Chriſt's Free-man; and therefore they might very contentedly abide in the meaneſt Calling, ſince every Station and Calling is equally a Method made uſe of by God to ſave the Souls of Men. For this requires no extraordinary and uncommon Courſes to be taken, but is effected equally in any, provided they are ſuitable to the Will of God. If then you are involved in Buſineſs and Worldly Concerns, do not imagine, that you are preſently to throw off all theſe Cares; No. The Duty God expects from you in ſuch a Caſe, is, That you ſhould live in the World as becomes a Chriſtian, that you ſhould make a good Improvement of the Talent committed to your Charge; that you ſhould practice and be fruitful in good Works, that you ſhould forgive Injuries, love your Enemies, diſtribute to the Poor out of the In-

Increaſe God gives you, and uſe your Authority and Intereſt to protect the Oppreſſed, and help them to right who ſuffer wrong; that you ſhould be frequent in Prayer and holy Exerciſe; attend conſtantly upon the Sacraments and other Ordinances of Religion, and ſo purſue the Affairs of the World, as to ſhew, that ſeeking the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs is your firſt and chief Care.

But after all, Nothing will more prevail for procuring us Favour and good Acceptance with our great Judge in the Day of his fierce Anger, than taking the Balance into our own Hand, by frequent Examination, and Judging of our own ſelves. For this Judgment, well performed by our own Conſciences in the mean while, will ſhelter us from the Terrours of that Dreadful Account, in which God will exerciſe his Juſtice and Severity hereafter. In ſhort, The Neceſſities and Cares, which our worldly Circumſtances engage us in, the Infirmities which beſet us on every ſide, the Miſeries which hang about us, the Imperfections we are ſubject to, and all the Troubles that oppreſs us, when ſubmitted to with Patience, are very powerful Means of qualifying us for Heaven; which after all is appointed for a Reward to Stedfaſtneſs and Perſeverance in Goodneſs. For *He, that endureth to the End*, (ſays our bleſſed Lord)

the ſame, and no other *ſhall be ſaved*, (Matth. x. 22.) It is by *ſeeking* diligently, and by continuing *knocking*, that Men obtain what *they ask*, (Matth. vii. 7.) The different Circumſtances of Humane Life, Diſgrace or Reputation, Diſappointment or Succeſs, Health or Sickneſs, Proſperity or Adverſity, Joy or Grief, and the ſeveral Duties incumbent upon each Capacity, are all uſeful, and will not fail to turn to good account at laſt, provided Men take due care to manage them well and wiſely. The only Danger is, the being miſtaken in this important Point. And it is a Matter of very fatal conſequence, either to make a wrong choice, or an ill uſe, of the ſeveral Expedients, which the Providence of God puts into our hands, in order to the furthering that one needful, that one great, Work of our Everlaſting Salvation.

Let us but conſider theſe important Truths with a true Chriſtian Spirit, and we ſhall find no great difficulty in being perſwaded of them. Let us ſet out with hearty and zealous Deſires of carrying our main Point; For without this good beginning all other Means will prove of no effect. The Anſwer *Thomas Aquinas* made to his Siſter, when ſhe begged his Directions what ſhe muſt do to be ſaved, was this, *That ſhe muſt Deſire and Intend well.* The grand Secret lyes in This, All the reſt will be

be eaſie to a Man whoſe Heart is once inflamed with this Deſire. *If your Wiſhes are eager and fervent*, ſays St. *Paulinus* *, *you will find the Way ſhort and ſmooth; but it will be rough and tedious if your Deſires are cold and languid.* For when a Man's Mind is ſincerely and earneſtly bent upon Salvation, his Induſtry in ſeeking and uſing the Means will be proportionable. And the Negligence of Men in this reſpect proceeds from their Inconſtancy, and ſhews them double-minded, that ſometimes they do, and ſometimes they do not, deſire this great End.

* Si deſideras, Via brevis eſt & ſuavis, ſi negligis, longa & laboriosa. *Paulin. ad Severr.*

From the very inſtant then of any One Expedient appearing proper for my Circumſtances, and of conſequence toward obtaining Heaven, I ſhall no longer continue indifferent with regard to it. I ſhall purſue and uſe it with my utmoſt Might, at the Expence of my Pleaſure, my Reputation, my Quiet, and all my other Temporal Advantages. In the choice of Means too I ſhall give Thoſe the Preference, which ſeem moſt ſafe and likely to ſucceed; For where ſo great a Concern as Eternity lyes at ſtake, Prudence will by all means adviſe, that I ſhould uſe my utmoſt Diligence to ſecure it. Thus I ſhall walk in the ſtrait Way of the Goſpel, without turning to the Right Hand or to the Left; I ſhall renounce even

my moſt lawful Appetites, where they are like to prove a hindrance to me: I ſhall break through all thoſe Bonds of Self-love, which prepoſſeſs, and render me partial, in my own Favour; I ſhall retrench every Irregularity in my Affections; and, according to that Advice in the Goſpel, be content to *pluck out my right Eye*, and *cut off my right Hand, if they* happen to *offend* me. Every Step I advance in the Way of God, will be ſupported and confirmed by the pureſt Sentiments of that Chriſtian Humility, which alone is the ſure Foundation of Solid Piety; becauſe this alone can diſpoſe the Mind to deſire and receive that Light of Holy Inſtruction entire, and without prejudice; and inſpire that meek, and teachable Temper, which the Holy Spirit requires, as a neceſſary Preparation for the Influences of his Grace. And upon all Occaſions I ſhall incline to Submiſſion, and Simplicity, and Patience, to *wait for the Salvation of the Lord quietly*, as the Prophet hath adviſed, (*Lam.* iii. 26.) That Suffering, which gives a Luſtre to Virtue, and that Mortifying of the Body, whereby the Soul receives new Life, will be my faithful and inſeparable Companions; And Prayer, which ſtrengthens the Weak, by ſuſtaining the Spirit of Man with Recruits from the Spirit of God, ſhall be my daily and delightful Food.

In

In a word. In order to bring forth Fruit unto Life Eternal, and attain the exceeding great and precious Promiſes of the New Covenant, I ſhall unite my ſelf to Jeſus Chriſt, as the Branch is joyned to the Stock of the Tree. For the Heart of a Chriſtian reſembles that Vine deſcribed by our bleſſed Saviour, which becomes dry and barren, from the Moment it is ſeparated from the Root, and ceaſes to receive the refreſhing Moiſture, that deſcends from Heaven; the conſtant Waterings of Divine Grace. But, *O my God*, make me, I beſeech thee, duly ſenſible, that a Deſire of being Saved includes a Deſire of, or at leaſt a being Content at the ſame time with, Humiliations, taking up the Croſs, and all thoſe Sufferings of which that Salvation is appointed the glorious Recompence. For, if it was neceſſary that thy Eternal Son ſhould firſt ſuffer many bitter Things and ſo enter into his Glory, even that Glory which was his own eſſential Inheritance; what Title can I have to any part of it, without a part in what he underwent? Fill then my Heart with theſe important Truths. Give me a ſaving Fear of thy Juſtice, and a holy Dread of thy Judgments, that I may conſtantly proceed with that Reverence, and Watchfulneſs, and great Caution, which are neceſſary to preſerve a Chriſtian in due Fidelity and unſhaken Perſeverance. Im-

print in deep and lasting Characters, that Oracle of thy Eternal Wisdom, and fix upon my Heart those weighty Words, which are the Sum of all Knowledge, and the true Christian Philosophy, *What shall it profit a Man, if he gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul, or what shall a Man give in exchange for his Soul?* (Matth. xvi. 26.) How wretched a Bargain would it prove in the End to possess the transitory and perishing Riches of Earth, and to lose the everlasting and unconceivable Treasures of Heaven? To be happy for a Moment, and exquisitely miserable to all Eternity? Ah! Do we at all consider this? Let us at least begin to do so in time. Do we govern our Affections, and by this Rule proportion our Esteem and our Content, our Love and our Hatred, and all the other Dispositions of our Souls? Do we manage our Conversation, and proceed in each Action of our Lives upon this great, this necessary Principle? Do we make choice of the properest, the safest Methods for this Salvation with all that Prudence which Faith would inspire? Do we indeed walk in the Paths of Truth and Virtue, with all that watchful Care, and serious Application, which is the Guard against Surprise, and a Shield against all that vast Variety of Accidents without, and Infirmities within, to which our present feeble and unsettled Condition

stands

ſtands expoſed? If we are got thus far, then it will be time to acquaint our ſelves with thoſe Errours and falſe Meaſures, which may be apt to miſguide us, and hazard the Succeſs even of our beſt Intentions.

CHAP. VI.

Miſtakes and Falſe Meaſures in the Way of Salvation.

THE Way to Heaven is ſo very difficult, The Obſtructions that divert us from, or hinder our Progreſs in it, ſo great; The Snares and Precipices that ſurround it on every ſide ſo many; The Ground on which we tread ſo rough; The Path ſo ſtrait, ſo ſlippery; The Conflicts to be undergone come on ſo thick; The Spirit is ſo weak, and the Fleſh ſo exceeding frail; that a Man can hardly be cautious enough againſt ſo manifold a Danger. Now the firſt Branch of this Caution we ſhall do well to imploy in obſerving the Falſe and By-roads, which we may meet with in our Travels; that, being thus fore-warned, we may avoid going wrong, where every ſuch Errour is of fatal Conſequence. And here we muſt by no means depend upon our own Strength and Judgment; ſince our Heart, our Un-

derſtanding, and all the Advantages of Humane Reaſon, will prove incompetent and deceitful Guides, to us, if not aſſiſted by ſome better Light. Let us then be careful to ſet out right, when Eternity is at the Journey's End. But we, alas! may take up the Prophet's Lamentation, (*Iſai.* liii.) *All We, like Sheep, have gone aſtray, We have turn'd every one to his own way*; walking in the Delights of our Heart, complying with the Vanity of our own Humours, and Deſires, and Paſſions, and vehement Tranſports, and other Follies and Exorbitancies of Life: Some whereof, the moſt neceſſary to be avoided in the Concern now before us, I deſign here to take particular notice of.

1. The Firſt and moſt Uſual ſeems to be, A looſe and general Deſire to be Saved, without deſcending ſo far as the Particular Means appointed for that Purpoſe. We make to our Journey's End, and are eager to come thither, without conſidering the Way that leads to it; We deſire the Port, but think not of the Sea, nor provide againſt the Storms in the Voyage to it; We pretend to the Promiſed Land, without going through the Wilderneſs; graſp at the Prize, but decline the Combat; and, like the Sons of *Zebedee*, are fond of our Lord's Kingdom, but overlook his Cup. There are but few Men, who upon diligent Examination will not find this to be their own Caſe.

Caſe. Every body would go to Heaven, but few are for taking up the Croſs, and following Chriſt. Thus we deceive our ſelves with a falſe Imagination of Zeal, and holy Deſire, which in Truth is no Deſire, without taking the Methods proper for its accompliſhment. For the Conduct of our Lives is the only Proof of the Sincerity of our Hearts. Thus many People pretend to Devotion, without the leaſt Principle of it; they ſequeſter themſelves to God, and yet retain irregular Affections; they put the Cheat upon their own Conſciences, and ſooth them ſelves up with empty Idea's, but have no part of the Subſtance of Virtue; And laying great ſtreſs upon this Phantome, they live and dye in this wretched imperfect Condition; and, have nothing more to ſhew for their Salvation, than this poor, looſe, and general Deſire of it. The Fate whereof at laſt will prove like that of *Job*, when the Deſires of his Soul were as the Wind, and his *Welfare paſſed away as the light Cloud*, Chap. xxx.

II. The Second Errour is greater than the Firſt. For Men do not only indulge and ſatisfie themſelves with this general Deſire of Happineſs, but they go out of the right Way to ſeek for Means of obtaining it. And the Pains they take, as well as the Means they pitch upon, are deceitful, becauſe their Choice proceeds upon impure Proſpects, and

and upon Carnal and Selfish Principles. And, thus the more they are mistaken in the Way they chuse, the farther they stray from the right and ready Path. The former Errour was an Errour of the Understanding only, but the Second is an Errour of the Heart and the Affections. For Men draw to themselves a Scheme of Salvation, such as is peculiar and agreeable to their own Fancy; They make Principles of Religion as they think; determine Virtue and Vice by their own Likings and Dislikes; and are for a flexible and debonnair Director, who will himself submit to be directed. Thus the main Point to be secured being the gratifying their own Inclinations, they chuse their State of living purely upon their own Heads, without consulting with God, or examining their own Abilities, or at all regarding the Reason of the Thing and Suitableness of the Undertaking. So that the Considerations which cast the Balance, are oftentimes no other, than those of Birth, and Quality, and Education: In short, Men fix sometimes by meer Chance and without Thinking at all, and generally upon no higher Motives, than those of Gain, and raising Fortunes, and securing Settlements, and the like. A Man engages in an Office, or grasps at a Preferment, or marries a Wife, without ever regarding how consistent this is with the Duty God requires from

from him: And how can we think it ſtrange, that Men, who govern their Actions at this rate, ſhould meet with ſo many Diſappointments, and be plagued with real Evils in thoſe Engagements, from whence their falſe Calculations propoſed and promiſed ſuch abundance of Good? Now this Practice of Conſulting our own Inclination and Temper in the moſt important Concerns of this Life, is yet more uſual, and more fatal too, in that Great Affair of Salvation. The Miſer will be content to give all in exchange for Heaven, except his Money: The Sordid Man expects to be ſaved by Frugality, and the Melancholy by Sourneſs of Humour and an Auſtere Converſation. The Phariſees were proud and ſuperſtitious, therefore they never troubled themſelves with any ſuch unpalatable Conditions, as Humility and Meekneſs; but choſe rather to go to Heaven by Faſting twice a Week. There are a great many Men that mortifie in ſeveral Particulars, and yet all the while follow their own Inclination: They aſſert their Freedom by diſengaging from all outward Objects, and yet are Slaves to their own Humour ſtill. They renounce the World, but not Themſelves; keep thoſe Commandments which are eaſie and convenient for them, and make no Bones of breaking all the reſt: In ſhort, They ſubmit, and are regular,

juſt where they have a mind to it, and no further. They would not for the World wrong their Neighbour in his Perſon or Eſtate, but they never ſcruple to murder his Reputation, and take away his good Name. They make a Conſcience of Faſting, and Praying, and being, what they call, good Church-people; but they make none at all of paying their Debts. In ſhort, They obey nothing but their own Humour, in a Matter, where the Chief Thing required of them is to croſs and ſubdue their own Humour. And the Way they mark out for Heaven is no other than the Way of their own Heart, without ever troubling themſelves to conſider, what it is that Faith hath revealed, or Almighty God preſcribed in the Caſe.

III. The Third is infinitely worſe than both the Former; by reaſon of that mean and contemptuous Notion, which it manifeſtly betrays, concerning the Real Value of Salvation; and the Ignorance Men live in of the mighty Conſequence of it to them. For People reckon Heaven ſo deſpicable a Matter, that, it ſeems, they care not how they live, provided they can but contrive to make a tolerable good End. A fine Lady, that calls her ſelf Chriſtian, after having lived all along in Profanation of her Marriage-vow, ſhall imagine, that to be chaſte when ſhe comes to dye is ſufficient.

A Rich Man, that hath lock'd up his Money close in his Chest, and never suffered the Poor to be the better for him while he lived, contents himself with a Charitable Bequest in his last Will; and calls that Giving to Pious Uses, which indeed is only Parting with That which Death will not suffer him to keep any longer. An Ambitious Man thinks it time to leave off his Intriguing, and renounce his Vice, when the Priest is doing his last Offices about him. And a hardned Sinner, grown old in Lewdness and Sensuality, perswades himself, that Receiving the Sacrament, and a *Lord be merciful to me a Sinner*, at his last Gasp, will set all right between God and Him, and secure his Soul effectually. And what a sort of Management is This? to set about the Great Concern of Eternity, when Men are disabled from discharging any worldly Business? They have not Sense enough left to make a valid Will, and yet they are thought in a very good Condition to enter into Covenants, and make up the Accounts of their Souls, and dispatch the whole Affair of Everlasting Salvation. As if Heaven were what Men can never be under any Incapacity of securing, though for the most frivolous Matters upon Earth they may. But are we indeed so foolish to expect, that *Grapes can be gathered of Thorns and Figs of Thistles?* For so in effect we do, when che-

cherishing an Hope so extravagant, as that of reaping the Fruits of Eternal Life from Death and Sin, a worldly and wicked Conversation. Is it not strange, that Men should live and go on with so much Assurance, when all the while they are in manifest danger of utter Ruine? This is by no means the Spirit and Temper of the Gospel, which above all things recommends Diligence and Watchfulness, and that upon these weighty and unanswerable Reasons; Because Death is ever at hand, and the Consequence of a Surprise is most dreadful; because our Religion professes it self to be a State of Spiritual Warfare, and our Life a Combat, without any Intermission: So that Heaven can never be attained, except by committing Violence upon our selves. And can we think it reasonable, that That Salvation which hath already cost the Son of God so very dear, should cost Us, who hope to reap the Profit of his Sufferings, nothing at all?

IV. The Fourth dangerous Seducement is that Spirit of Presumption and Spiritual Pride, of which St. *Augustine* declares, that it separated him from God, and blinded his Eyes to such a degree, as disabled him from discerning the Truth. Hence Men measure all that hath any tendency to Salvation by their own false and feeble Idea's: They had rather follow their own Notions, and

and rely upon private Judgment, than ſubmit to the Authority of thoſe Guides, whom Providence hath ſet over them: They make much reckoning of their own Deſerts, and place greater Confidence in Them, than in the Mercies of God. The Foundations they build on, are the particular ſort of Life they lead, the Profeſſion they are of, the Convent, or Habit, by which they are diſtinguiſhed, the Holineſs of the Place where they dwell, the Virtues of the Company they keep, and the Sanctity of them with whom they communicate in the Worſhip of God. *I am a Monk*, ſays One, and *I a Hermit*, ſays Another; and *I converſe with none but good Men*, boaſts a Third; and *I have a great Inclination to Prayer*, and *am very tenderly affected when at my Devotions*; or *My Intentions are all upright and pure*, and *my Zeal for God's Glory fervent*, and the like. Now all this is the moſt extravagant that can be. And if we will refer our ſelves to St. *Auguſtin*'s Judgment in the Caſe, ſuch Reaſonings are no better than idle Deluſions. *It is not* (ſays he) *the Place, but the Practice, which makes the Man Good; An Angel ſinned in Heaven, Adam fell in Paradiſe; and where could there be greater Advantages of Holineſs, than here?* How ridiculous is it to depend upon

Locus non facit ſanctos, ſed operatio bona. Peccavit Angelus in Cœlo, peccavit Adam in Paradiſo. Quis locus ſanctior? *Aug. Serm. 37. ad frat. Erem.*

the

the Piety of our Neighbours and Acquaintance, when even the Converſation of the Saviour of the World was not a Preſervative ſufficient for *Judas*? And what does a Profeſſion, or a Form of Holineſs ſignifie, to Them, whoſe Good-works are not ſuitable to what thoſe Circumſtances require? Let us not then vaunt with that Church of *Laodicea*, (Rev. iii.) *Behold I am rich, and have need of nothing*, when all the while we are *miſerable, and poor, and blind and naked*; void of all Merit that might juſtifie this Confidence, and ready to fall into the groſſeſt Enormities, the Moment God leaves us to our ſelves. Let us beware of laying too great Streſs upon that affectionate Zeal we feel in our Devotions; For This is not always the Effect of Piety, but very often of Temper and particular Conſtitution. *Not every one* (ſaith the bleſſed Jeſus, *Matth.* vii. 21.) *that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*; For this Kingdom conſiſts not in Words but in Actions. Let us not obſerve ſo much what we have done already, as what we have ſtill to do. A Traveller, that would take up with the Satisfaction of the Way he had gone, without conſidering how far he hath yet to go, is not like to make any great Progreſs in his Journy. The having made the beſt of his Way hitherto will be of little ſervice, it is the reaching that Place whi-

whither he is bound at laſt, which muſt ſet him at reſt. Thus did St. *Paul*, who lookt upon his whole life, as a Race without any Intermiſſion, and a Combat, wherein he muſt never ceaſe from Fighting. The Irons he was loaden with, the Scars he bore about him, the Perſecutions with which he was ſo ſeverely exerciſed, did not exalt his Mind, or diſpoſe him to a ſecure Temper; he was ever looking forward to future Sufferings; and made no other uſe of the Advances then paſt, but by them to encourage himſelf with hopes of like Succeſs in thoſe which were to come. *I follow after*, (ſays he) *and preſs on, if by any Means I may attain*, Phil. iii. Thus he adviſes the *Corinthians*, (1 *Ep.* ix.) *ſo to run, that they may obtain.* For the true Chriſtian (according to St. *Bernard*'s Remark, *Ep.* 252.) ſets no Bounds to his Virtue, nor ever thinks he hath done enough. He never ſtands ſtill, but ſees much more to be done, than is done. He thirſts continually after higher Perfections, whereas the preſumptuous Man is perfectly content with himſelf, and in this ſuppoſed Safety lyes his greateſt Danger.

V. A Fifth Seducement is the Contempt of thoſe we live among: This is the Product of the former; for preſuming highly of our ſelves puts us upon making Compariſons, and in thoſe Compariſons it is eaſie to foreſee, on which ſide the Favour and Pre-

Preference will fall. This was the Pharisees Errour in the Parable, who immediately fell to thanking God, *that he was not as other Men are*, Luke xviii. And the reason why he thought himself a Man of more nice and scrupulous Honesty than any of his Neighbours, was that he saw all Their Faults, but none of his own. Thus the Presumptuous always divides unequally: He is sure ever to reserve the greatest Share for his own Use, to value, and to love himself, above all Mankind besides. For he looks upon himself in the best, and upon his Neighbours in the worst, Light. He hath a distinct View of their Imperfections, without discerning any of their Virtues; and he sees nothing but Virtue at home, without perceiving any Failing there. The Vices of others he does not only cull out, but aggravate and magnifie; but for his own (if any such he acknowledges) he turns the other End of the Perspective, and represents the bulkiest and most deformed of them all exceeding little, and such as are scarce distinguishable. Hence it is, that there is scarce any Body so disorderly and extravagant, but he reckons himself more regular than his Neighbour. And let him be never so much out of the way, still no Body is so right as he is in his own Eyes; because Men are least acquainted with their own State, and will not be brought to judge impartially concerning it.

VI.

VI. The Sixth goes further yet. For by this unjuſt Preference of our ſelves, we come to affect new Ways of our own; fly off from the Opinions and Practices of thoſe we deſpiſe, think it beneath our Wiſdom and exalted Virtue to keep the common Road; Abound in our own Senſe; and, inſtead of adhering and ſubmitting to Them, who ſpeak to us from God, conſult no Oracle but that of private Judgment. No Notions then are grateful, none of any value, but our own; and we continue inflexibly deaf to every thing, except our own Reaſon or Prejudices. We uſurp an Authority of calling every thing into queſtion; bring it before us, try and ſentence it at the Bar of our own Opinion; and ſo become as falſe and as peremptory in our Deciſions, as we are inſolent and unjuſt in pretending a Right of judging what does not properly come within our Commiſſion to judge. The true Believer does not proceed at this rate: He conſults God in all he does; the Goſpel is his Standard, and he preſumes not to take one Step, without the Direction of this faithful Guide. An Inſtance of this Humility we have in St. *Paul*; who, though enlightned by immediate Revelation, yet went up to *Jeruſalem*, to conſult with St. *Peter*, and others of Reputation in the Church, *leſt* (as himſelf ſays, *Gal.* ii. 2.) *by any means he ſhould run, or had run in vain.* Nothing

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is of greater Conſequence to a Chriſtian, than this Modeſty and Diſtruſt of ones own Determination in nice and difficult Caſes. The want of it is chargeable with all the Hereſies, that have infeſted the Church. For, when once a Man forſakes the old beaten Track, to find out new By-paths of his own deviſing, that Submiſſion is loſt, which Pride caſts off as an unſupportable Yoke. God hath no where promiſed the ſame Aſſiſtances to every private Man, which the Church in general have reaſon to expect from him: And if any Irregularity happen in that myſtical Body, this will not be ſufficient Warrant to rend it, and deſtroy its Unity by petulant Separations. For the Evil of Schiſm, generally ſpeaking, is of more formidable Conſequence, than that which Men run away from; and Diviſion is more apt to create or heighten the Diſeaſe, than it is to cure it.

VII. A Seventh and higher Step yet is, a Spirit of Curioſity, which cannot but be wrong in all its Meaſures, becauſe it entertains no Notions above the Objects of Senſe and Things of this World. Theſe Men will diſpute you World without end, concerning a future State: They examine every Article of Religion, with the utmoſt Severity and Inſolence of Criticks: They will needs diſcover what God hath thought fit to hide, and undertake to know what they ought to

to remain in contented Ignorance of. They hearken with too great Deference to their own ſuppoſed wiſe Reflections; and, in that Clearing of Points which they require, refuſe with a becoming Humility to ſubmit their own imperfect Reaſonings to the Wiſdom and Eternal Reaſon of Almighty God. Thus frequently falling into the Fault of that Apoſtle, who overborn by a Spirit of Contradiction and Unbelief, preſumed to impoſe Conditions upon him, to whoſe Authority he owed Submiſſion. *Except I ſhall ſee in his Hands the Print of the Nails, and put my Finger into the Print of the Nails, and thruſt my Hand into his Side, I will not believe,* John xx. 25. Such is that preſumptuous Boldneſs Men affect, when they would quench the purer Light of Faith; for when once Men are full of themſelves, and lean too much to their own Underſtandings, nothing ever ſatisfies them; nay, they ſtart new Opinions in the Scruples and curious Enquiries indulged by them; new Ways and Methods, new Directors and Reaſonings, and ſomewhat out of the common Road is ever aimed at, becauſe old and vulgar Truths and Solutions of Difficulties are grown into Contempt. Men are greedy to fill their Heads with Novelties and Notions, which contribute more to perplex the Mind, than to advance or heal the

Si ad Veritatem redire cupit non eſt neceſſe viam quærere novam. Bern. *de* Grad. Humil.

the Understanding: They seek not so much for Instruction as for Delight and Entertainment in their Studies; and an Errour fresh out of the Mint hath the advantage of a stale Truth; as if This were the worse for wearing, or it were an Excellence to think differently from those that went before us. We pretend to seek the same Thing and to go the same Way with our Ancestors, but yet we are beating out new Tracks in it. But the Prophet's Advice was otherwise; *Stand ye in the Ways* (says he) *and see; and ask for the Old Paths, where is the Good Way, and walk therein; and ye shall find rest for your Souls*, (Jer. vi. 16.) 'Tis the Temper of the World, and the particular Character of the Age we live in, to love Novelty, and to reason eternally upon Matters above our Reason. The Truth is, We are too nice Philosphers, and too little Christians.

VIII. The Eighth is a Dislike of the Truth, which naturally proceeds from that vain Curiosity I have been speaking of. Men are not ignorant of their Duty, but they are not in love with what they know. The small remains of Faith, which enlighten the Understanding, are not strong and bright enough to warm their Affections. We speak admirably well of God and Religion, without being at all moved with what we say. That which recommends Piety to our esteem,

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is the Noiſe it makes, the Credit it procures, and not the inward Graces which edifie us. The Cauſe of this Irregularity I take to be The Loving our Selves more than Truth. By this moſt terrible Seducement it is, that we believe the Hiſtory and Doctrine of Jeſus Chriſt, without believing the Rules of Morality he hath left us; we can perſwade our ſelves of the ſublimeſt Myſteries of Faith, but not of the moſt expreſs Maxims in Practice. We make no queſtion of the Son of God's taking our Fleſh upon him, but we cannot ſubmit to the Engagements this lays us under, of imitating his unſpeakable Humility and Condeſcenſion. We ſubmit to all thoſe Wonders in the Trinity of Perſons in the Unity of the Godhead, which are beyond our Comprehenſion; but we can by no means underſtand, that Greatneſs and Wealth are Hindrances to our Souls future Happineſs. And what a Madneſs is This? to imagine that a bare Acknowledgment of the Myſteries of Religion can be ſufficient, without producing any Teſtimonies of our Faith; and to lead the Life of Libertines and Heathens, under the Profeſſion of ſuch pure and holy Principles, as Thoſe of a Chriſtian are. For certainly a Man ought ſo to believe the Goſpel, as not to think himſelf at liberty not to practiſe it. But They who do otherwiſe, are led into this

Errour from the Opposition between the Affections and the Understanding. That which is evident to the Judgment, makes no sensible Impression upon the Heart. And this Misfortune is a Step towards that which I am about to mention next.

IX. Which is, Ninthly, An Universal Distaste for Piety and Spiritual Matters. There are abundance of Persons, who, though they lead not vicious Lives, are yet in the certain and ready Road to Damnation. They are not void of Desire and Inclination to be saved; but they are so given up to a trifling Temper, that they live without Thought, and never employ themselves in any substantial Business. Their Minds are too airy and roving, to consider seriously, and to set heartily about those things which are necessary to be done in order to Salvation: Nay, they do many things that are essential and necessary, but they do them without due Consideration. They frequent the Prayers of the Church daily, they receive the Sacrament monthly, they attend upon Sermons as they have opportunity; But still they bring a worldly Mind to Church and Communion-table, and this makes them discharge such Duties without any effectual Impression. And though their Behaviour have nothing in it, that is scandalous and very bad, yet neither hath it any thing good; Nor do they work

work out their Salvation, becauſe they are not ſtayed enough to ſubmit to think or work at all. Plays and the Park, Diverſion and Mirth, Pleaſant Company, and an Entertaining Book are uſually the things that take up all their Time. Thus their whole Life runs off in unprofitable Trifles, in Negligence and Thoughtleſſneſs; And how free ſoever it may be from the Reproach of Men, yet it muſt needs be highly blameable with God. Becauſe they perfectly loſe the End of Living; and ſpend that Life in Idleneſs and Pleaſure, which was deſigned for a conſtant and laborious Exerciſe of their Virtue, and a painful perpetual Combat for the obtaining that Crown, which is given to none, but them who ſtrive lawfully, and perſevere, and are victorious over their Spiritual Enemies. This want of Regard for their Salvation brings ſuch Men by degrees to a Spirit of Lukewarmneſs and Indifference in the Uſe of the Holieſt Things. This renders all they do of no effect for obtaining Heaven, and they are ruined, perfectly for want of Concern whether they be ſaved or not. This is the Condition of moſt People of Quality: Even Thoſe among them that live regularly and free from Debauchery, yet live careleſly, and without any viſible regard for a future State. They are addicted to Vanity, and reſolve to make Reli-

gion bend to their Humour: They damn themſelves by labouring to Model the Goſpel after their own Way, and to Reconcile the Holy Rules there, with the Corrupt Principles and Modes of the Age. And what can be expected from a Proceeding ſo full of Contradiction, but that Confuſion threatned by the Prophet (*Iſai.* xiii.) to thoſe who look ſometimes upward to Heaven, and ſometimes down to the Earth; and would fain joyn God and the World together; *even Trouble and Darkneſs, and Dimneſs of Anguiſh, and being driven ſtill to greater Darkneſs.*

X. The Tenth Errour, which uſually follows after thoſe already treated of, is a Beginning to Doubt of Things Men have formerly believed; and a ſort of tottering Faith, which boggles and raiſes Scruples concerning the moſt eſtabliſhed Truths of Religion. The Heart becomes groſs and carnal, and nothing but Darkneſs and Perplexity preſents it ſelf to the Underſtanding. Men now ceaſe to obſerve the Hand of God in the ſeveral Occurrences of Humane Life; they look no higher than themſelves; they enjoy Proſperity, and undergo Adverſity, without conſidering by whoſe appointment they come upon them. Thus they never trace the Good and Evil Accidents back to their true Original Cauſe; which makes it difficult for them to diſcern and acknow-

acknowledge that Almighty Hand; Which keeps it ſelf out of ſight in the moſt wonderful Diſpenſations toward Mankind, that it may leave room for the Exerciſe of a Chriſtian's Faith. Sometimes indeed Men wilfully ſhut their Eyes, and will not ſee the Author of thoſe things that happen to them: For it is God, who by the Bitterneſs of Affliction teaches Man that Wiſdom, which the Sweets of Proſperity diſpoſe him either not to attend to at all, or very quickly to forget. So that our God is equally to be praiſed and adored, when he wounds, as when he heals. Becauſe every ſort of Events is ordained by Him for the Eternal Advantage of his Faithful Servants. From queſtioning the Providence of God, Men come by degrees to doubt his Juſtice. And, not content to ſettle their Faith upon ſtated and ordinary Methods, they require Miracles to build their Hopes upon. Thus imitating that extravagant Zeal of the rich Man in Torments, (*Luke* xvi.) who deſired a Meſſage from the Dead for the Converſion of his Brethren. They expect that God ſhould be ſtill more clear and expreſs, in the Revelations of Himſelf, and the Way to Heaven. I know not (ſay they) what he would have me do; God hath never declared Himſelf to Me in particular. How Man! not declared Himſelf! Why, Every Creature is thy Monitor; and He ſpeaks

to thee in all thou ſeeſt and feeleſt. Theſe are his Voice, and a loud one it is, to all who are diſpoſed to hear and be awakened by it. If you attend not to him ſpeaking in the Scriptures, in the Creation, in the Works of Providence, neither would you hearken to purpoſe, though he ſhould condeſcend to ſpeak immediately from Heaven. Particular Revelations are liable to the ſame Objections and Diſappointments, with thoſe that are General. And if you make no Improvement of thoſe Advantages, which Reaſon and Faith have given you already, neither would you grow better by any of thoſe imaginary Helps, which you fondly propoſe for your more effectual Conviction.

XI. The Eleventh is Diſtruſt and Diſcouragement in Religion, the natural Conſequence of Doubt and Scruple; A Temper like thoſe Diſciples, who upon our Lord's Death laid aſide their Hopes, that *it was He, who ſhould have redeemed Iſrael*, (Luke xxiv.) Faith is a Chriſtian's proper Strength; and when this languiſhes, Hope decays and dies, and every thing appears difficult and inſupportable. For the Mind, being no longer ſuſtained with the Proſpect of future Good, faulters and droops. The Way of Virtue ſeems frightful, the leaſt Hardſhips beat a Man back again; That which was once a Motive turns to a Terrour; and

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his Salvation is thought impossible, because he sees his Duty only on the dark and difficult side; and falls insensibly into a Horrour and Aversion for all Spiritual Things. This is an Errour very common among Persons deeply engaged in the Business of the World: They form to themselves very terrible Idea's of Religion, and the Difficulties attending it, from a false Notion they have entertained of Christian Perfection. Religion indeed is difficult and a very formidable Undertaking to some Persons, but then it is to such only as want a vigorous Faith, and such a Perswasion of future Rewards as should enable them to persevere in it. For Hope, which is the Anchor and Support of Christians, must needs grow weaker, in proportion as Faith abates. And in regard this Want of Faith disposes Men to look upon the good Things of the present Life under the Quality of real and lasting Good; and upon the Happiness of another State, as a Good in Imagination and Expectation only; it is not to be wondred, that Men thus prepossess'd, cannot prevail with themselves to part with the perishing Riches of this World, in exchange for the incorruptible Treasures of the next. From this false mis-grounded Wisdom Men resolve to hold fast what they are possess'd of in present; and think themselves no longer *Strangers and Pil-*

grims, but Citizens and ſetled Inhabitants, upon Earth. For the Inſenſibility and Diſreliſh of Heavenly Things, naturally produces an Inordinate Love of the World.

XII. And That is the Twelfth dangerous Errour, which St. *Gregory* takes notice of *, as conſiſting in an irregular Fondneſs for our own Perſons and preſent State. Men think of nothing but living on; and all the Care and Thought they are capable of, is employed on this purpoſe. They are always caſting about what may conduce moſt to their Health; and the Mind is entirely taken up in the Preſervation of this Body, which, if they could prevent it, ſhould never die or decay. To this we owe that general Neglect of thoſe Auſterities and neceſſary Mortifications, which Religion enjoyns. Faſtings and Prayers are ſparingly uſed; The Tenderneſs Men expreſs for their Bodies, and the Cruelties they are guilty of to their Souls, are both alike unconceivable. We uſe wonderful Precaution for an ill State of Health, or a weak Conſtitution; but the Diſeaſes and Wounds of our Conſciences we take no care to heal. And the falſe and ſenſual Love of our Selves, which is our governing Principle, makes us conſider every thing with

* *Reproborum mens ergo dies vitæ præſentis tanto amore conſtringitur, ut ſic ſemper appetant vivere, quatenus ſi valeant, vivendi curſum nunquam deſiderent finire.* L. 18. Mor. c. 17.

with regard only to our Perſons; and to chuſe or refuſe it, as it may contribute to our Strength, our Beauty, our Pleaſure, or Preſervation of the outward Man in good Caſe. Thus we fancy we ſhall never die, by declining to think of, and to provide for, Death. We hope to live for ever, and from thence accuſtom our ſelves to think we ſhall do ſo in good earneſt. The People of this Temper look upon Time, which is perpetually in motion, as a ſtable thing, which will always abide with them; and imagine their ſhort Continuance in this World to be a laſting and unalterable Settlement. They think they are cut out for a longer Stage of Life than others; Meaſuring their Probabilities of fulfilling it, by no other Rule than that of their own Deſires; And this extended Line of Life they ſtretch to a ſort of Immortality; thus dreaming of wild Chimera's, and living as if they were never to die. For all Reflections of Death they put far from them, as Thoughts uneaſie and interrupting to their Enjoyments; and ſo give themſelves no manner of trouble in providing for that terrible Change, upon which their Eternal Concerns muſt be determined. In ſhort, All the Induſtry and Application of theſe Perſons aims at nothing elſe but the ſecuring and prolonging their abode here below. And we ſee them grow old in Buſi-

neſs and Care, without any Fear ſo great, as that their Hands ſhould not be full, and leſt any Interval of Leiſure ſhould leave their Thoughts at liberty to be employed about Dying. They forget their true Native Country, that they may find Opportunities of lengthening their Exile in a Foreign One. And, by being over-ſollicitous for a Temporal Life, they loſe the Ineſtimable Jewel of an Eternal One. But Woe be to this Fatal Seducement! for Chriſt hath told us in the Goſpel, that *He who loves his Life* above his Duty, *ſhall* certainly *loſe it*. This unhappy Miſmanagement neceſſarily expoſes Men to dying unprepared; For how can he but be ſurpriſed, who never thinks of dying, and is ſure to be ſnatched out of the World ſooner than he expected? And how ſhould they make any tolerable Proviſion for this moſt important Change, who either baniſh all Conſiderations of it from their Minds, and die as inſenſible of their latter End as they lived; or never ſubmit to think of it, till they are diſabled from thinking at all to any purpoſe? This is the Caſe of the Debauched and Diſſolute, hardned in Wickedneſs, and old in Lewdneſs; They have ſome falſe Appearances of Remorſe and Penitence when they come to die, but none of thoſe ſincere Relentings, which attend upon true Repentance. The outward Marks of Grief which they expreſs,

press, are frequently the Effects of Fear, occasioned by the frightful Prospect of approaching Death: And if they happen to recover, those Terrours wear off with the Disease, and they are the same hard Wretches as before. So just reason had St. *Augustin* to say *, that *a Death-bed Repentance, it is much to be feared, is but a very lame, nay a dead and ineffectual Repentance.*

* In infirmo infirma est Penitentia, & in moribundo timeo ut ipsa moriatur. *Ser. de Temp.*

XIII. This Errour is pursued close by Another, which is a Love of Gain, and Greatness, and Slpendour, to which the Fondness for our own Persons and the present Life must needs betray us. And this is the Folly of Them, who will needs be more than ordinarily Religious, in hopes of getting Reputation or Preferment by it. In which they resemble the Sons of *Zebedee*, who proposed to themselves Honour and Advancement by becoming the Disciples of Jesus Christ. Their Heads were full of Carnal Notions, and they were content to follow the Saviour of the World, provided they might sit on his Right-hand and on his Left in his Kingdom. Their Mother too, as St. *Jerom* observes *, with an Eagerness natural to that Sex, earnestly requested a present Benefit for them, without considering or looking forward

* *Mulier aviditate fœminea præsentia cupit, immemor futurorum.* L. 3. Com. in Matth.

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to what would be hereafter. But what was our Master's Reply? *Ye know not what ye ask.* You talk of Thrones and Kingdoms, but how improperly, To Me, who propose nothing else to my Disciples, but Sufferings, and Self-denial, Taking up the Cross, and Laying down their Lives, when God and Duty require it? Is This a Time to think of being Great, when I your Lord debase, and empty, and make my self so Little? The Severity of the Reproof shews the Greatness of their Errour; and how exorbitant a Desire those Men cherish, who, like Them, set their Hearts upon the World, and are eager and intent upon Earthly Greatness, when all the while they profess a Religion, which teaches them to aspire after no Greatness, no Promotion, but in Heaven only. The People of the Jews, who are stiled in the Gospel, *the Children of the Kingdom*, were yet cast out by their Father, because being filled with the Spirit of this World, they formed to themselves a Messiah, upon the Model of their own Vanity, and made him great after the Manner and Pomp of this present State of Things. And, in truth, nothing can be more directly opposite to the Temper of a Christian, than Ambition and Covetousness, in a Religion, whose main Design it is to inculcate Humility and Contempt of the World. These Designs of raising Fortunes

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and Families are usually the Bane of Souls; The Splendour of the Great blinds their Judgments, or debauches their Principles. But, if such have any Faith or Religion left, let them consider the Heighth of their Station with Fear and Trembling, remembring what Engagements this lays upon them. For there is nothing so easie as to abuse Plenty and Greatness; nor any thing more difficult, than to satisfie in all Points those several Duties and Opportunities of doing Good, which such a Condition requires and furnishes Men with.

Lastly. The Misery and very Extremity of Errour, is when Men make that Errour a Matter of Pride to themselves, and even Glory in their Folly and Blindness. They take a Pleasure in going Astray, because their Heart is vitiated, and there is no Light left in their Understandings. This is very usual with Men who suffer themselves to be imposed upon by the glittering Appearances of temporal Advantages. They run, like Lovers in distraction, after earthly Vanities; and, proceeding upon the mistaken Principles of corrupt Flesh and Blood, they honour Vice with the Name of Virtue, and stigmatize Virtue with the opprobrious Characters of Vice. The Care to provide for another World they ridicule for Weakness

Tanta est Cæcitas hominum de cæcitate gloriantium. Augustin. Conf. l. 3. c. 3.

neſs and Cowardice; and a hardned Contempt of Heaven and Hell they would paſs upon the World for Courage, and Wit, and good Senſe. But *Wo to them* (ſays the Prophet) *who* thus *call Evil Good, and Good Evil, who put Darkneß for Light, and Light for Darkneß, that put Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter*, (Iſai. v. 20.) Such was the Perverſneſs of thoſe chief Prieſts, who were proud to think, that none of the Scribes or Phariſees, the Men of Quality and Reputation had believed in Jeſus, (*John* vii.) Such that of thoſe Chriſtians in the laſt Times, who St. *Peter* ſays (2 Epiſt. ch. ii.) ſhall cauſe the Way of Truth to be evil ſpoken of, and expoſe Chriſtianity to the Cenſure and Reproach of Infidels. *Becauſe they have forſaken the right Way, and are gone aſtray, following the Way of Balaam the Son of Boſor, who* loved *the Wages of Unrighteouſneß. Whoſe Judgment now of a long time lingreth not, and their Damnation ſlumbereth not.* The very Patience of God, by which he forbears them; His ſeeing their wicked Actions, and holding his Peace; thoſe Bowels of Long-ſuffering, and tender Mercy, by which he defers their Deſtruction, ſerve to no other end, but to *treaſure up* to themſelves a heavier Portion of Wrath, *againſt the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God.* For the more remarkably kind, and compaſſionate, and gentle he hath been,

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in ſuſpending ſuch Mens Puniſhment, during this Seaſon of Tryal and Mercy; the more ſevere, and terrible will the Execution of his Judgments be, when that time of Mercy is expired, and the Rigours of his Juſtice take place. Their Deſtruction too is irretrievable, and paſt remedy, becauſe they are in love with Ruine, hate thoſe that labour to undeceive them, and think nothing ſo troubleſom, ſo inſupportable, as the Rebukes, and wholſom Admonitions, given them for the good of their Souls.

Theſe are the Seducements and Falſe Meaſures moſt uſual with Them, who forſake the Way of Salvation. When once a Man is out of the right Road, every Step he takes is for the worſe; and one Miſtake draws on an infinite Train of more and greater. But ſince imprudent Men are extreamly ſubject rather to change than to correct their Errours, by falling into a New while they are running away from an Old one; therefore I think it neceſſary in the next place to prevent this Unhappineſs: And, after having ſhewed how Men wander from the right Way at firſt, to ſhew ſome of thoſe Seducements, to which they are liable, when endeavouring to recover themſelves, and return into that right Way again.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

Errours to be avoided in Correcting our Errours.

I. THE Sinner is not of himſelf ſenſible, that he goes aſtray: He wanders wide, and perceives it not, till enlightned by Grace. This diſcovers to him the good Way he forſakes; This inſpires him with Reſolutions of returning into it. But even that Reſolution many times proves no better than a new Errour. Men ſatisfie themſelves with reſolving well, and ſtop there: And even thoſe Reſolves are only the faint Motions of a languiſhing Deſire, like that of *Solomon*'s Sluggard, who wills and wills not; ſuch as ſpends it ſelf in idle Wiſhes, the Multitude whereof diſtracts and ſtifles his beſt Intentions. They are continually putting off their Converſion, as St. *Auguſtin* obſerves *, who was for deferring all till to Morrow. The Concern of their Souls is eſteemed one of thoſe uneaſie things, which, in tenderneſs to their own Quiet, they baniſh as much as they can out of their Thoughts. Even the Making of their Will takes place before the Setting their Conſcience

* *Modo, ecce modo, ſine paululum: ſed modo & modo non habebat modum.* Conf. l. 8. c. 5. *Quamdiu? quamdiu? cras & cras; quare non modo?* Id. l. 8. c. 12.

ſcience in order: All their other Affairs are taken care of betimes, but as for Converſion and Salvation, Theſe are reſerved for Old Age; and Men give themſelves to God, when the World will have no more to do with them. Nay, when they are advanced ſo far as a peremptory Reſolution of Amendment, yet even then this Reſolution is in effect vain and unconſtant, and deceitful: They accuſe, and they juſtifie themſelves: They condemn their paſt Follies, and immediately contrive Excuſes for them; They would renounce Sin, and yet they would not; they act in contradiction to themſelves, and give their Tongues and Hearts the Lye *; Several fair Pretences they form to themſelves, ſeveral weighty Obſtructions they labour under, and profeſs to lament: *Well*, (ſay they) *This Soul of mine muſt be taken care of:* And it muſt indeed. For the Deſigning it is of no conſequence, unleſs it be accompliſhed; and thus themſelves frequently tell themſelves; But all to very little purpoſe. For Life runs off in the midſt of theſe airy Intentions, and Death ſurpriſes them, before they have done any thing at all in the Matter. At the bottom, their Deſires are for a Good Life here, and Heaven hereafter; but they boggle

* *Sæpe ſibi mens ipſa mentitur.* Gregor. *Abrumpatur illa interminabilis ſæcularium negotiorum catena. Et ille de neceſſariis ſuis per totam vitam labor.* Euch. ad Val.

boggle at the Trouble which must attend them; They have some good Motions, but such as are opposed and overpower'd by vitious Inclinations. They likewise deceive themselves with some Efforts of a superficial Repentance, but it is such as lyes more in the Head than the Heart; and they depend upon some little outward Reformation, without purging the inward Parts, or going to the Root of the Disease. All this is but a Round of Desires; An imaginary Conversion, but at the same time a State of real and substantial Faults. Sometimes they begin well, but end ill. If they change their Behaviour, this Alteration is managed, more according to the Inconstancy of their own Mind, than by Obedience to the Spirit of God. The Heart is still the same. And all this pretended Recovery is only a Shifting of the Disease. Such is the Condition of most Men, whose Hearts are divided between God and the World; and would fain cleave to the one, without forsaking the other.

II. The Second Errour upon this Occasion is a vitious sort of Shame, which suppresses the best Desires and Intentions, and checks all Thoughts of Returning to God, when a Man hath gone Astray for a long time already. This mistaken Modesty is like the Dragon in St. *John*, which is described standing ready to devour the Child

of

of Light as soon as it was born. Men stand out against all holy Motions, and drop their Designs of living better, by a wretched foolish Concern, which they pretend to have upon the account of those they call their Friends; to whom their Conduct ought to be justified, and who, they are desirous, should see that they maintain their Character. Thus did *Victorinus* (as St. *Augustin* relates) stand in Awe of his Friends, and nothing stuck with him more in his Conversion, than the Apprehension of giving Them Offence. How many once well-intended Reformations have proved abortive, meerly by being over-power'd by the imaginary Terrours of this mistaken Prudence? How many Souls have been lost, by submitting to the Tyranny of that vain Thought, *What will People say of me?* and by continuing Slaves to the Opinion of the World, rather than applying themselves seriously to consider the Weight and Necessity of their Duty? This ridiculous Caution is the Highway to eternal Destruction. It hindred the Conversion of the Jews, who could not have a due Regard for the Son of God and his Doctrin, because they had so excessive a One for the Honour and Praise of Men. This makes Men obstinate and tenacious in their Errours; They think their Character and

Amicos suos verebatur offendere, sed depuduit vanitati, & erubuit Veritati. Aug. l. 8. Conf. c. 2.

and Honour concern'd to perſiſt in the Wrong, rather than own themſelves in a Miſtake. This is the Bane of thoſe wretched People, who have ſpent all their Days in Extravagance and Debauchery. They count it better and more creditable to Die hard, than to give the World occaſion to talk of their Change; becauſe indeed common Opinion is the Rule they govern themſelves by. They go on in their own Ways, meerly becauſe they have done ſo a great while, and been bred, and lived all along in them. They are come to Years of Diſcretion, and becauſe they ought to have been Wiſe ſooner, they reſolve now never to be ſo at all. It is too late they think to Mend, and leſs Diſgrace to be Damned, than to begin a good Work, when their Life is almoſt at an End. And bring themſelves they cannot to undeceive others, with whom they have converſed ſo many Years, by acknowledging their Errours, and undeceiving themſelves.

III. A Third ſort of miſtaken Men there are, who are able to conquer the Weakneſs and Irreſolution of their own Minds, and can deſpiſe the Opinion and Cenſure of the World, but they take falſe Meaſures, and ſet out wrong. They think themſelves ſafe, and yet are out of the Way, becauſe they take the Shadow and Appearance of Virtue for the Thing it ſelf; They form to themſelves

ſelves a falſe Righteouſneſs; and that which they depend upon deceives them in the End. According to that Obſervation of the wiſe Man, (*Prov.* xvi. 25.) *There is a Way which ſeemeth right unto a Man, but the End thereof are the Ways of Death.* They entertain falſe Notions of Faith, and Religion, and the Fear of God, and Repentance, and Humility, and Devotion, and even of Reaſon it ſelf: And for want of true Principles, they ſet up to themſelves ſuch as are empty and imaginary. Theſe Men are irregular by Rule; and ſettle their Conſcience upon Intereſt, and Paſſion, and carnal Conſiderations. They expect to find Life in the Region of Death; and think they ſubmit to the Law of God, while in truth they only follow their own Humour, and ſet off Vice with a ſpecious Colour of Virtue. Thus the fine Ladies vindicate their Luxury and Vanity, by a Pretence that theſe things are what the World expects from People of their Quality. Thus Superiours call Rigour and an imperious Spirit, a Love of Diſcipline and neceſſary Severity. For there is nothing ſo extravagant, which at this rate may not be juſtified by an Appearance of Duty; nor any Management ſo vicious, that ſome Pretence may not be found to cover or to recommend it. Men frame a Scheme of Morality which ſhall comply with every thing; and bring

their

their Conſciences to ſuch a paſs, that no ſort of Evil ſhall give them Diſquiet. Every ſtrict Zealot finds out ſome Art and Method, to refine his Hypocriſie. Ill Humour paſſes for Sincerity, Cenſoriouſneſs for Zeal, and all manner of Wickedneſs is not only excuſed, but even ſanctified. The moſt furiouſly Paſſionate Man alive is not without ſome Arguments to defend the Violence of his Rage. Every thing is falſe and out of order in the Minds of Men thus corrupt in their Principles. When they are afraid to offend God, this Fear proceeds not from the Crime, but from the Puniſhment of Sin. The pretended Reproaches of Conſcience are no other than the Terrours natural to the Danger of their Condition. When they accuſe themſelves of Folly and confeſs their Sins, This Remorſe is in their Mouth and Words only, without any ſincere Indignation, or Repentance in the Heart. They imagin their Wounds healed, while they are ſtill bleeding and green. It is not the Goſpel they believe and ſubmit to in the Exerciſe of religious Duties; but their own Imagination, which Models the Articles of Faith according to its fanciful Scheme within: and believes and practices juſt what the Perſon hath a mind to. This is the Caſe of that falſe Devotion, and thoſe pleaſing Satisfactions in approaching to God, with which

which Men amuse their own Souls: when all the while these are not the Effect of Piety, but the Inventions of their own Mind, and the Consequence of their Temper and particular Constitution. A Life thus led is no better than a long Scene of habitual Errour and Deceit; and Men are led into a Fool's Paradise at last, while they impose upon their own Judgments, but cannot with all their Artifice mock or impose upon Almighty God.

IV. The Fourth is that Vanity, which insinuates it self even into the most Solemn and Holy Exercises of Religious Duties. Foolish vain-glorious Man loves Virtue that he may get Reputation by it: He denies himself, and abandons all, but even this Mortification he values and is exalted upon; He sometimes conceals himself with great Industry, but it is with a Design of being more publickly known. For how many Arts does Pride use, or what Form will it not take to shew it self? Every Motion of the Soul serves to disguise it. By this We take a liberty of censuring the Behaviour of Others, as soon as we have brought our own to be somewhat regular; and cannot content our selves with being Innocent, without presuming to judge and sentence severely every blameable Action that comes in our way. Thus, if we have no sensual or worldly Inclinations, yet we

abound

abound with Uncharitableneſs and Spiritual Pride; Even our Modeſty is vain, our Humility tainted with intolerable Preſumption, and our greateſt Virtues full of Oſtentation. The fooliſh Virgins in the Parable, who were blinded with a falſe Confidence in the Purity of their State, were found at their Lord's coming to want Oyl in their Lamps. That ſecret Pride, which render'd them impure in God's Eyes, was concealed till they came to die; but then it turn'd to ſo ſad an Account, that all their Chaſtity could not compenſate for it. Now the true Believer is not vain-glorious or ſelf-conceited; he labours to recommend himſelf to the Approbation of Almighty God; he obſerves the conſtant Dependance upon His Mercy in which he lives; he is very ſenſible, that were he not ſupported by that mighty Hand, he ſhould fall every Moment: And his Converſation is pure and acceptable throughout, becauſe it is entirely Modeſt and humble *. And this is the peculiar Danger of the Vice we have been ſpeaking of; that virtuous Men are moſt expoſed to it. For whereas other ill Qualities are ingender'd and promoted by one another, and always propagate

Dum de virginitate ſua gloriam ſuis expectant, in vaſis ſuis oleum habere neglexerunt. Greg. Hom. 12. in Evang.

* *Vanitatem tanto magis fuge, quanto melior eſſe cœperis; cætera enim vitia creſcunt vitiis, vanitas virtutibus.* Eucher. ad Val.

gate in their own kind, This is a ſort of heterogenious Production, and is created and cheriſhed only by good ones.

V. The Fifth Errour incident to Men in the Reformation of their Lives, is Self-love; which prevails to that Degree, that they follow their own Inclinations, when they pretend moſt to follow the Will of God. Nay even when we our ſelves imagine, that our Intentions are ſet upon Obedience to his Commands, our Intereſts, and Inclinations, and private Proſpects are the Principles that govern us: and we only walk in our own ways, when we appear to our ſelves and others, to walk in His. Thus did that covetous King of *Iſrael*, who did his own will in reſerving the moſt part of the Amalekites Treaſure for Booty while he imagined himſelf fulfilling the Will of God in deſtroying the Perſons, (1 *Sam.* xv.) Men often ſeek for God with a deſign to find Themſelves; and go to Him, only that they may take him in their way home again. The Faſtings, the Mortifications, the ſolemn Feſtivals, and ceremonious Applications of his own People heretofore he declared his Indignation againſt for this Reaſon, becauſe in the Days of *their Faſt they found Pleaſure*, and regarded themſelves much more than Him, (*Iſai.* lviii.)

Thus it is, that Men form to themſelves Schemes of Perfection, and new Ways of

Salvation, in agreement with their own Humour and Opinion. Our ſelves are what we often ſeek even in Devotion it ſelf; we impute that to Religion which proceeds from our ſelves; and give Countenance and Authority to our private Fancies, by pretending that venerable Name, and deriving their Original from God. We profeſs to ſeek his Glory, in things whoſe true End is to ſerve our own Intereſt and Reputation. For after all, Virtue taken abſtractedly, and ſeparate from the gainful Conſequences of it, hath but a very poor ſhare in our Intentions and Deſires. Men love the Advantages and the Pleaſure of a retired and devout Life, more than the Piety of it; There are ſome ſecret Views of Honour, and Credit, which, though the World perceive not, yet the Perſon himſelf is very tenderly affected with, even then when he had renounced all ſelfiſh and worldly Conſiderations. And the reaſon why they ſtill continue to move him, is becauſe Self was at the bottom of that very Renunciation.

Sic amatur Veritas; ut quicunq; aliud amant hoc quod amant Veritatem eſſe velint. Conf. l. 10. c. 23.

And thus, as St. *Auguſtine* ſays, They who are fartheſt from Juſtice and Truth, yet would fain appear to the World to follow them; and that they may do ſo, whatever Meaſures they think fit to take, they call them by the Names of Juſt and True.

Theſe

These seem to be the principal, and most dangerous Errours, by which Men are misguided in their Way to Salvation. But the sincere and judicious Christian, who shall honestly and faithfully sound his Conscience to the bottom, and by frequent Examination endeavour to discover the deceitful Depths of his own Heart, will find no doubt a great many more than I have, or could possibly have, taken express notice of. He will there find his greatest Purity blemished with impure Designs of Interest and Vanity. He will plainly see, that what passes upon Him and Others for Piety, is but too often nothing better then false and worldly Wisdom; and that his most disinterested Love of God, does at last resolve it self into a Principle of Self-preservation, and a servile Dread of Divine Justice; Thus if he set himself in good earnest to unfold all the intricate Windings of his Soul, somewhat of Counterfeit and base Alloy will be discovered in every Virtue, and a World of Dissimulation in all his Vices. For what Weakness, what Deceit is it, that the Heart of Man is not subject to? If he be humble, his Humility is like *Saul*'s, who submitted himself before God, but desired at the same time, that the Prophet would do him Honour before the People, (1 *Sam.* xv.) If his Hands are innocent, his Heart is depraved; If he have Zeal and Warmth, he wants

Perſeverance in Goodneſs; if he be Pious, he is Proud and Preſuptuous too; If he be outwardly ſtrict and regular, that fair Appearance covers a World of inward Irregularities, which he neither corrects, nor perhaps diſcerns in himſelf. It is uſual to obſerve many Men zealous in their Intentions, who yet are led aſtray into falſe Meaſures by a lurking Hypocriſie, which they conceal both from themſelves, and from thoſe who have the Guidance and Care of their Souls. Some again we may meet with, who are eternally perplexing themſelves with freſh Scruples; who meaſure their Virtues by their Doubts, take no other Proſpect of their Duty, but that which repreſents to them the Dangers and Difficulties of doing well: that fall by an indiſcreet Fear of falling, and ſuffer themſelves to be vanquiſhed, before ever they engage the Enemy. What ſhall I ſay of thoſe Men, who in Matters of Religion, ſtick cloſe to the Letter which kills without attending to the Spirit that giveth Life? They vainly affect a rigorous Exactneſs in all the Forms and ſolemn Acts of Virtue, and are wretchedly negligent in thoſe inward and ſubſtantial parts, wherein the very Soul and true Eſſence of Chriſtianity conſiſts. They depend uponthe outward Obſervation and Exerciſe of Devotion, and think this will carry them to Heaven, while they continue in the manifeſt Neglect or Breach of God's Com-

Commandments; They make new Systems of Morality, and forsake the Directions of the Gospel; They are skilled in the Virtues of Angels, and remain ignorant in those which concern Men and Christians; They renounce those Duties which are proper to their respective Capacities, and apply themselves to such as are indifferent, and forreign to their Condition; Their Notions are severe, but their Conversation loose and negligent; they choose the safest side in common Business, but in Concerns of Religion follow the slendrest Probabilities. What shall we think again of that infinite number of People, who follow their Saviour, as Sheep do their Shepherd, without hearing his Voice; or of the many more who hear that Voice without understanding it; or of the many more still, who understand what they ought to do; but do not what they know they ought to do? In a word, What can we think of Them, who trouble themselves about their Neighbours Actions, and see distinctly what becomes Others, but never regard their own Duty, nor consider what Obligations lye upon their Conscience; that profess a passionate Concern for other Peoples Danger, but take no Care to secure their own Salvation; that are wise and discerning in Their Business, but stupid and blind in their own? These are so many, and such a multitude of like Errours are to be found in the World, that it were endless but to mention them particularly.

But the moſt deplorable Errour of all is, when Men give themſelves up to the leading of ſuch Guides, as are themſelves Wanderers from the right Way: And this is a Misfortune, which ſometimes happens to thoſe, who have been ſo happy as to keep their Minds diſingaged from all the former Seducements. Some Perſons there are very zealous and ſincere in their Deſires and Endeavours for Salvation, who yet continue in the broad Way to Deſtruction, becauſe they follow thoſe that lead them wrong. The fault St. *Chryſoſtom* finds with the Jews, (*Hom. in Matth. Ser.* 4.) is even in our Days more common than can eaſily be imagined. That, I mean, of giving more Credit to the falſe Prophets than to the True; not taking ſufficient care to diſtinguiſh between the Preachers of Truth, and Falſhood; deſpiſing the Voice of the good Shepherds, and running after Hirelings and Strangers. And this Diſeaſe becomes incurable, when God for a Puniſhment of Mens Sins, gives them up to thoſe Guides, whom himſelf in juſt Judgment hath darkned, to take away from them the Spirit of Diſcretion, and deliver them up to Ignorance and Errour. And this he ſometimes does, to viſit upon them the horrible Impiety of profaning their Holy Character; and following their own vain Imaginations in the Guidance of Others, rather than they will

will adhere to the Light of God's own Word and Spirit; or to chaſtiſe that ambitious and aſpiring Temper, by which they ſet up for Teachers and Paſtors, without any regular Call, or thoſe Qualifications, which are neceſſary for the due Diſcharge of ſo weighty an Office. The Direction and Government of the Church are appointed by God, and put into the Hands of choſen Men, for Edification and not for Deſtruction. You are placed as Overſeers of the Flock, not for your Own, but for Their Advantage, if this important Truſt, which the moſt eminent Saints heretofore have undertook with Reluctancy and Trembling, work in You no awful Impreſſions, it is by reaſon of your Pride and Preſumption; and becauſe a falſe and worldly, not a true godly Zeal hath puſhed you forward to the Undertaking. And if you ſhall pretend to be Phyſitians of Souls and heal Others, while you your ſelves continue full *of Wounds and Bruiſes, and putrifying Sores*; If you profeſs to teach the Way of Life, and yet walk on in Sin and Death; If you, like thoſe Shepherds reproached by the Prophet, (*Nahum* iii. 18.) Slumber, inſtead of Watching, over the Flock whom you pretend to guard, Your Power is a mere Uſurpation, and your Call to the Miniſtry falſe and forfeited. Wo to thoſe diſſembling Guides who affect to paſs for perfect Patterns of Virtue, while they

are flattering and unlike Copies. Who in the Exercise of their Ministry become the Instruments of God's Indignation to the Persons under their Charge; instead of being what their Station intended them for, Vessels of Mercy, and Instruments of Reconciliation in the Day of his fierce Anger! I mention not here those Preachers, who in distributing the Bread of God, Poyson their own Souls, with that very Nourishment, which they prepare for their Hearers. Nor Them, who walk themselves in smooth and pleasant Ways, while they prescribe Severity and Self-denial to their Congregations; Nor Them, who for Interest, flatter their People, and lull them a sleep with a false Peace and Security, by base Compliance with their Vices, and a cruel Concealment of their real Danger. Nor shall I insist upon that terrible Mischief of Scandal and ill Example; the Rock upon which unwary Souls are so exceeding apt to split. For how many of all Conditions, but especially Men of Quality, are undone and hardned in Vice, by the Countenance and Authority it receives from the Numbers, or the Character, of the Persons that indulge themselves in the Practice of it? In a word; There are Seducements and Snares every-where, and those, who are heedful and considerate, will find no part of the Way to Heaven, which is not thick set with them. And how

how ſhall we prevent or eſcape this manifold Miſchief? No way ſo likely ſure, as by lifting up our Hearts inceſſantly to God, and earneſtly imploring his Aſſiſtance in ſo difficult an Undertaking. To which we muſt likewiſe add our own moſt conſtant and diligent Endeavours to *work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling*; which was the Apoſtle's Advice to his *Philippians*, (Ch. ii. 12.) and the enforcing this good Counſel ſhall be the Buſineſs of my next Chapter.

CHAP. VIII.

That Men ought to Work out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling.

NO Doubt they ought. For what Security can the Chriſtian have in a Life ſo expoſed to Hazards, and how can he be too careful and apprehenſive, while walking in a Way ſo very intricate and apt to be miſtaken? The Road is very full of Turnings and Precipices, and, every ſtep he takes, the Man is in danger of being mazed and loſt. *Happy* therefore is *He, that feareth always*, (Prov. xxviii. 14.) and moves with conſtant Circumſpection in ſo difficult a Paſſage. This Conſideration it

was, upon which the wise Man called, *The Fear of the Lord, the Beginning of Wisdom.* And most certain it is, that the first setting out in the Way to Salvation, must be a Distrust and mean Opinion of our own Worth and Abilities. A Disposition, which will not be hard for any Man to attain and be perswaded to, who is but once well acquainted with himself. For the Darkness of our Understanding is so gross, the Weakness of our Will so manifold, the Miseries and Frailties of our Nature so sensible and so deplorable, that they are very just and great Occasions of Humiliation and Fear. The strictest Righteousness of Man is no better than Unrighteousness, if God should be extreme in his Judgment upon it, says St. *Gregory.* And *Isaiah*, (Ch. lxiv. 6.) *We are all as an unclean Thing, we all do fade as a Leaf, and our Iniquities like a strong Wind have carried us away.* This Reflection makes me even tremble, when I observe that false Ease and treacherous Tranquility of Mind, in which the Ladies of Condition enjoy themselves, in the midst of that effeminate, that pleasurable, that thoughtless Life, which most of them at the utmost peril of their Souls are wont to lead. They scarce give themselves the trouble of a serious Thought, about securing this great Concern of their Salvation. Prayers, and Alms, and

Omnis humana Justitia Injustitia est, si strictè judicetur. Greg. in Job, c. 9.

and Sacraments, and other outward and ordinary Means of compaſſing that End are almoſt grown into perfect Diſuſe among the Women of Mode and Gayety. They live in a dreadful Neglect and ſtupid Forgetfulneſs of God, and take more Pains to ruine themſelves, than Good Men do to ſave themſelves. We read in the Lives of the Fathers, (*Ruf.* l. 3.) that the Abbot *Pambo*, meeting one Day upon the Road to *Alexandria* a Courtiſane richly habited, and with a very engaging Air, could not forbear bewailing the Miſery and Folly of this poor Creature; but with a Sigh made this Reflection: *Ah! how happy ſhould I be, did I but take as much Pains to pleaſe God, and ſave my ſelf; as this vain Woman does to be agreeable to the World, and to ruine her ſelf.* Such in effect is the Life of moſt of our modern Ladies. One Hair amiſs, or a Knot ill tyed, gives them great Concern, and whole Days almoſt are ſpent in decking their Perſons, that they may draw the Eyes and Admiration of Men. But Eternity, and rendring themſelves acceptable in God's Sight, is the leaſt part of their Care. And how deplorably wretched are theſe People? They profeſs themſelves Chriſtians, but if they be ſo, let them conſider a little, what a Madneſs it is to entertain the Doctrines of the Goſpel, and pretend to believe ſuch a Judgment to come, as that hath warned us of, without expreſſing

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any fear of ſo dreadful a Reckoning, or applying themſelves to provide againſt it? What Blindneſs and Stupidity is it, to know that God *is a Searcher of Spirits*, and will weigh all our Actions in the Balance of Equity and Truth, and not tremble at the Apprehenſions of his Juſtice? For if, as St. *Peter* ſays, *The Righteous ſcarcely be ſaved, where ſhall the Ungodly, and the Sinner appear*; or what Confidence can He have in the ſafety of his Condition?

Let us enquire a little into the Juſtice of ſuch Peoples Pretenſions, and what they can alledge in behalf of ſuch a Management. What Claim can You, who make it a Principle to live eaſie and pleaſant, and to gratifie your Inclination in every thing, What Claim, I ſay, can You put in to that Kingdom, which is promiſed to ſuch alone, as deny and mortifie their Deſires; and ſtrive againſt what you ſo induſtriouſly indulge? Where are your Good Works, Your Charity and Alms-deeds, your Fruits meet for Repentance? What have You done to deſerve that Crown, which is laid up as a Prize for Them who fight manfully, and according to the ſtrict Rules of Combat? How many weary Steps, how many anxious Cares, and what infinite Pains and Diſquiet are you content to beſtow upon a Temporal Eſtate; and do you expect that your Eternal Inheritance ſhould coſt you nothing? Conſider that

that Glory which the Martyrs purchaſed with their Blood; which Holy Virgins and other eminent Saints could not attain to at leſs expence, than that of Renouncing the World, with all its Vanities, and ſenſual Delights; and which ſo many good Men ſtill have not the Confidence to hope for, but upon Condition of painful and perſevering Virtue, diligent Doing, and patient Suffering of God's Will; And are You exempt from theſe Terms, or is Your Life priviledged above that of other Men? Who hath given you any Aſſurance of being more gently dealt with than Your Brethren in the Day of your Lord's Wrath? You eſpecially, who have ſo long deſpiſed the Riches of his Mercy and Forbearance? It is an Infatuation common to Worldly-minded Men (ſays St. *Gregory*) that their Hopes and Thoughts are too intent upon Tranſitory Enjoyments, to bear any due Regard to thoſe that are Durable and Eternal. They think ſo much of this Life, that they never think at all of the next. Their Heart is ſo darkned with the Ignorance of their Underſtanding that the Day-ſpring from on high can find no entrance, nor ſcatter the thick Clouds that lye upon their Souls. The Threat-

Sic cæcitate cordis oculus claudi-tur ut æterne lucis non intendatur. 18. Mor. c. 7.

Spem tot am in rebus tranſeuntibus ponunt, quæ tranſeunt concupiſcunt cunque ultimis tranſeuntia cogitant manſura nulla tenus ſperant. Ibid.

Threatnings of an Angry God, the Terrours of his Judgments, the uncertain Approach of Death, the dreadful Consequences of that Great Affair, which the Gospel styles the *One thing needful*, make no Impression upon them, because they give themselves no leave to think of these Matters. And the only Reason of their inward Quiet, and seeming Satisfaction is, because they live without Reflection, and useall possible endeavours not to see their own Danger.

But let not us, who have the Faith of Christ, remain in this unthinking State: Let us remember, and look for and tremble at the Expectation of that dreadful Day, in which God shall render to every Man according to his Works. Let us imitate the most eminent Saints who wrought out their Salvation with profound Reverence and godly Fear. Such was the Temper of the Primitive Christians, whose Souls a lively Faith had filled with great and noble Idea's. They kept their Eyes ever fixt upon Heaven, where all their Treasure and their Hope lay. They lived in perpetual Awe of God's Judgments. They lookt indeed with Comfort upon the Treasures of his Mercy, but then they did not overlook the Treasures of his Wrath and Vengeance too. And that great Day, in which God shall do himself Right, and take a just Revenge, upon all the outragious Impieties of those hard-

ned

ned Wretches who have abuſed his Mercy, appeared to Them ſo much more formidable, in proportion as their Faith was more vigorous, becauſe this gave them a juſter Notion of the dreadful and mighty Conſequence of it. St. *Paul*, after he had received the firſt Fruits of Grace, and was enlightned with the cleareſt Rays of the Spirit of Adoption, excites the Faith, and awakens the Fears of his Chriſtians, by telling them, that he ſtill laboured continually to *bring his Body into Subjection, leſt after having preached to others, he himſelf at laſt ſhould be a Caſtaway*, (1 Cor. ix. 27.) St. *Jerom* acknowledges, that he could find no abſolute Safety even in the greateſt Solitude; The Remembrance of thoſe Freedoms and Diverſions he had allowed himſelf in his younger Days, was continually returning upon his Imagination, and gave great Interruption to his moſt religious Exerciſes: The Idea's of that Vanity and Luxury, which he had formerly beheld among the Roman Ladies, purſued and dogged him cloſe into the Deſarts: And the utmoſt Auſterities of a retired Life were not able to guard him from their Aſſaults. For his Fleſh, even when mortified with Faſtings and Sackcloth, rebelled againſt the Spirit ſtill, and the moſt rigorous Humiliations could not deliver him from Horrour upon each ſingle Reflection of the laſt Judgment. The ſhrill Sound of that Trum-

Trumpet, which must awaken the Dead out of sleep, and summon all Mankind before the great Tribunal, was ever rattling in his Ears, and shewing him the terrible Pomp of his Judge. And his Soul was pierced through with Trembling and Astonishment, as oft as these Images were painted a fresh in his Mind.

How many other illustrious Saints, after having passed their Lives in the most abstracted Solitude, that so by leaving the World they might Meditate upon this terrible Day of the Lord without Distraction of Thought, and prepare themselves for it by a long and solemn Course of Repentance, have yet look'd pale at the approach of Death? And whence this Amazement and Concern, but from the Contemplation of the Divine Justice, and that severe Scrutiny, which neither the Strictness of their Lives, nor the Purity and Innocence of their Hearts could shield them against, when they considered, that upon this fatal, this uncertain Moment, the Affairs of Eternity must entirely depend? We read in the Lives of the Fathers, that *Theophilus*, Patriarch of *Alexandria*, after having lived long in great Caution and Holiness, when he came to dye, said to his Friend, *O happy* Arsenius, *who hast always had this Hour in view, and made*

Beatus es, Arseni, quia semper hanc horam ob oculos habuisti. *Pelag. l.* 1. *de Vit. Patrem.*

made it thy conſtant Buſineſs, to prepare for it! And the Tenth Book of the ſame Hiſtory informs us, that a certain Anchoret, whoſe Virtue had ſtruck an Awe into the very wild Beaſts themſelves, could not yet be void of Fear concerning his own Salvation. The Lions, among whom he ſlept ſecurely, trembled at his Preſence, but he himſelf trembled no leſs at the Preſence of God, and the Recollection of his own Frailties and great Imperfections. Happy then is He, who perpetually humbles his Soul under the unſpeakable and myſterious Counſels of God; and entertains ſuch a Dread of his Juſtice, as does not deſtroy a becoming Confidence in his Mercy and Goodneſs! Now when ſuch Perſons as theſe, notwithſtanding their extraordinary Sanctity, have yet diſtruſted their own Merits, and been ſo ſollicitous what the Event of the laſt Judgment would be to them; How prodigiouſly ſenſleſs is that Sinner, who imagins himſelf in perfect Safety? The beſt Men have ever been the moſt humble: And They, whoſe Lives have been freeſt from Faults, have expreſt leaſt Aſſurance in their own Innocence, when they came to dye; Becauſe their Faith had opened their Eyes, ſhewed them to themſelves in a true Light, and convinced them of what infinite Conſequence Death and Judgment are to every Chriſtian.

But,

But, if the Examples of Other Men are not ſufficient to terrifie us, let us at leaſt turn our Eyes and Thoughts inward upon our ſelves. There we ſhall ſoon obſerve the Corruption of our Hearts, the Inconſtancy, the daily woful Inſtances of our Weakneſs, the vaſt Variety of Dangers that hem us in; the Difficulty of this great Work, and the general Effeminacy and wretched Careleſneſs of theſe laſt Days. For in the midſt of an Age ſo extreamly depraved as Ours, Who can preſerve his Innocence, and not do ill? Who can be ſo ſtedfaſt and faithful as always to do well? Who can be ſure, that even his moſt holy Actions have been attended with all that Simplicity, all that Freedom from By-reſpects, and Paſſion, and Intereſt, which the Purity of our Religion requires? And if we could account for what we have done, yet how ſhall we be able to juſtifie all the Ends and Intentions upon which we have acted? How hard an Undertaking is it to ſift our Hearts to the bottom, to ſee through all the intricate Windings of them, and form a true Judgment of the ſecret Springs and Principles, which put us into Motion? There lye alas! many Weakneſſes in the remoteſt Corners of our Souls, which we our ſelves many times are not ſenſible of. The moſt Perfect Men have ſome Reſerves, ſome Niceties for Honour and Worldly Conſiderations,

ſiderations, which they do not, or do not care to ſee. And the moſt Mortified have their Darling Sins, and Defects, which they ſtill cheriſh, through ſome partial Tenderneſs for themſelves.

What need I mention that inceſſant War between the Fleſh and Spirit, in which ſo many gallant Men have fallen: Or that Remiſſneſs, ſo exceeding common even in the Beſt of us all, who, after long and frequent Encounters with the Difficulties of Virtue, have at laſt been tired out, and loſt their Reſolution in the Fatigues of ſo laborious a Conflict. The Weakneſs of Man is ſo great, that he is ever liable to miſtake his own Condition, if he do not prevent that Errour by conſtant Remembrances of his own Miſery. He is an Earthen Veſſel, and, as ſuch, in Danger of breaking every Moment.

Let then even the Righteous be afraid for himſelf, in the midſt of the ſundry Snares, to which his Virtue ſtands expoſed. When we are told, that *Samſon* was bereaved of his Strength, that *David* fell into the two blackeſt Offences, and that the Wiſdom of *Solomon* did not preſerve him from great and grievous Errours, who can read theſe things and not tremble? St. *Auguſtine*'s Remark is very juſt, *That the Fall of the Strong is like a Clap of Thunder to awaken and terrifie the Weak.* And indeed when even the Stars are darkned,

ned, and the Heavens melt at the Preſence of God; when the Faithfulneſs of the moſt celebrated Saints hath been ſhaken and given ground; when he charges even his Angels, thoſe pureſt and moſt perfect of all his Creatures, with Folly; what are We, poor Worms of the Earth, that grovel in Mire and Filth, that We ſhould preſume our Virtue impregnable? If the beſt Men under the Law heretofore made no Difficulty to confeſs, that their moſt exalted Piety was blemiſhed with many ſecret Defects; if the Evidence of the thing conſtrained Them to acknowledge a great Alloy of Impurity and Weakneſs, in their moſt righteous Actions, and ſuch as they laboured to recommend themſelves to God by, what can we think is the caſe of Sinners, who do not only converſe, but comply with the Corruptions of a moſt profligate Age? And where indeed ſhall we promiſe our ſelves Safety? or what Hour can we call our own? For Man is to Day, and to Morrow he is no more. And how frequent Inſtances do we ſee of Perſons ſnatched away in the midſt of their Days, ſurpriſed by Death before the Buſineſs of Life be half done, with Minds full of Projects, and Pleaſures, and thinking of nothing leſs than Eternity? And were there no other Danger, what Security can we have, who hold our Lives by ſo uncertain a Tenure?

Let

Let us then betimes and in good earneſt deliver our ſelves from all thoſe vain Deluſions, which obſtruct our Care of this great Work, and abate of that Fear and Trembling which the Apoſtle preſcribes, as a proper Diſpoſition for effecting it. Let us revive and refreſh thoſe moving Idea's upon our Hearts, which Faith had formerly engraven there, and take care to draw the Lines of Eternity ſo ſtrong, that they may ever affect us, ever quicken our Endeavours to proceed in the ſtrait Way, and fix our fickle Minds in inviolable Fidelity and Perſeverance. Let us now lend an Ear to the Lamentations of the Prophets, thoſe Sighs and Groans extorted from them, by the Conſideration, how very few they are that ſhall be ſaved; and what an infinite Company make the *broad Way* their Choice, and ſhall be given up to Everlaſting Deſtruction in that Day. Let us repreſent (as we are able) to our ſelves the manner in which God ſhall exerciſe his Judgments, What that day of his Wrath, that cruel Day (as the Prophet *Iſaiah* ſtyles it) (*Ch.* xiii. 9.) ſhall be. Remember that the Son of God who now with all the Tenderneſs of a moſt affectionate Father pities his Prodigal Son; He who ſeeks his ſtray Sheep, and follows it into the Wilderneſs with all the cheerful Pains, and a ſollicitous Concern of a loving Shepherd, will then call every one of us to ac-

account for our Actions; And the Character of a Judge in which he ſhall appear will oblige him to Severity, as much greater then, as his abuſed Mercy to us hath been in the mean while. This is that Lamb in the Revelation, which ſhall then become a Lion to devour thoſe Sinners, who have been injurious to his Goodneſs. And then ſhall he exhibit himſelf to the View of the whole World with all the terrible Pomp that Majeſty is capable of. The Sun *and Moon ſhall be darkned, the Stars ſhall fall from Heaven, and the Powers of Heaven ſhall be ſhaken*, (Matth. xxiv.) The Earth alſo ſhall quake for fear, and all Mankind ſhall be ſeized with Horrour, at the ſight of a Judge no longer to be entreated. And who can ſuſtain the Burden of his fierce Anger? For as St. *Paul* admoniſhes us,) *It is a fearful thing to fall into the Hands of the living God*, (Heb. x.) The Power of Men is limited and ſhort, They can only puniſh as Men: But the rigorous Judge, at whoſe Tribunal all that ever was done ſhall be expoſed to the View of Heaven and Earth, ſhall puniſh with all the Omnipotence of God: and diſcharge all thoſe Treaſures of Wrath, which he hath heaped up for that very Purpoſe, that he might let fly all his Thunder, and the utmoſt Terrours of his Vengeance at the Heads of hardned Sinners. As his Patience formerly knew no Bounds, ſo neither ſhall his

his Juſtice then; No Power ſhall be able to oppoſe, no Relenting ſhall check its Courſe. He ſhall himſelf be Judge and Accuſer both, The Vows we made in Baptiſm, he was Witneſs to, and will revenge our broken Faith. Nothing can be concealed from his Knowledge, but all things lye naked and open in his Sight. All the external Advantages of High Poſt, and Parts, and Riches, and Greatneſs ſhall then diſappear, and only the Man and his Actions be conſidered, as they are abſtractedly, and in themſelves. But oh! that fatal Moment! How full of Terrour and Deſtruction will it be, when the now kind and lovely Face of our Saviour ſhall from thenceforth be for ever hid from the Wicked, and his Ears ſhut to their loudeſt Cries and Groans? Ah my God, let me, I beſeech thee, have my Puniſhment in this Life, and Pardon in the next: If Juſtice muſt be exerciſed, let Time be the Seaſon of it; but let Eternity be the Seaſon of Mercy. I am content to feel the Terrours of thy Wrath at preſent, provided the ſweet Comforts of thy Clemency and Goodneſs may be my joyful Portion hereafter. But, O ye wiſe Men of this World, who have employed to vile Purpoſes the Parts and Wiſdom, which God gave you for the promoting his Glory and your own Salvation; and made your Advantages Inſtruments of deeper and more cer-

tain Ruine, Tremble at the Apprehenſions of this Judge. And all ye Great Ones of this World, let Confuſion and Amazement overwhelm you, to think that the Power, the Plenty, the other diſtinguiſhing Favours of Providence, which made a Difference between your Circumſtances and thoſe of common Men, have ſerved to no other Effect, but to upbraid your own Ingratitude, to provoke the juſt Indignation of ſo kind a Benefactor, and add to the Meaſure of Your Stripes for abuſing the Talents committed to your Charge.

But, if this terrible Proceſs of the laſt Judgment, if that formidable Army of the Creatures drawn up in Battel to be the Executioners of the Divine Juſtice upon obſtinate Sinners, (as the wiſe Man tells us they are, *Wiſd.* v.) If the publick Diſtribution of Rewards and Puniſhments, which ſhall in that important Day be made after a moſt juſt and exact, but withal a moſt fearful and aſtoniſhing, Manner; If theſe frightful Idea's are yet weakned by their Diſtance, and paſs for Objects too remote to excite our Diligence and Fidelity; let us at leaſt attend to thoſe Conſiderations, which are Senſible and Preſent. The Swiftneſs of Time, the Shortneſs of Life, the Uncertainty of our Call and great Change, The Intricacies of our Paſſage, The Shelves and Sands of which this dangerous Sea is full;

full; and the infinite variety of Accidents daily and hourly capable of working our Ruine, let these however awaken us, and shake off that Stupidity, which would expose us to a surprise, never to be recovered, if once it be our Unhappiness to be overtaken unawares.

But withal; To the Intent our most diligent Preparations for Death and Judgment, expresst in the strictest and most holy Conversation possible, may not be disappointed of their desired Success; We ought to be exceeding careful, that they do not exalt us with too presumptuous Assurances of our future Happiness. It is by no Means upon any Desert of our own, that we are allowed to repose any part of our Comfort and Confidence. For if the least and very first of our Wishes and Pantings after Heaven be not absolutely in our own Power, how can we be secure of our own Perseverance? And, besides that, The Communications of Grace do not entirely depend upon Us, it deserves to be considered, that These are not at all times equally propitious. But even when they are most large and liberal, it will prove no very easie Matter, to keep this Gift in a place so foreign to its purity, as the Heart of corrupt Man; and in the midst of so many Enemies, who are offering Violence, and eternally laying Designs against it. To this Purpose

the Devil, whoſe Power and Subtlety both conſpire to render him a very formidable Adverſary, makes uſe with wonderful Addreſs, not of the World only and its Charms againſt us, but even makes our ſelves Inſtruments of our own Ruine. From hence I think it very plain, that no Degree of Perfection and Improvement can ſet us above the Apoſtle's Advice, of *working out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling*. If we have indeed lived up to the Principles of our Profeſſion, and all along teſtified our Faith by our Works, let us not boaſt with thoſe indiſcreet Labourers in the Goſpel, of having born the Burden and Heat of the Day, for poſſibly, as our Saviour ſays, in the Cloſe of that Parable, (*Matth.* xx.) notwithſtanding our moſt ſanguine Expectations, *there are Firſt which ſhall be laſt, and the Laſt ſhall be firſt*. If our Conduct be free from blame, and our Reputation unblemiſhed in the Eye of the World, let not this puff us up, for there were Virgins, we know, who, notwithſtanding the Purity of that State, were excluded from the Marriage of the Lamb, (*Matth.* xxv.) If our Way of Living be abſtemious and ſevere, let us not be too big with this thought neither, for we read of a Phariſee that faſted twice a Week and was very punctual in his Tithes and Offerings, who yet did not return to his

his Houſe juſtified, (*Luke* xviii.) Let us not reckon too much upon our good Works, after ſuch a Warning, as the Young Man in the Goſpel (*Matth.* xix.) Who, though a ſtrict Obſerver of the Moral Law, was not able to come up to Evangelical Perfection. If we have taken leave of the World, yet even ſo we are not ſafe: For how many Monks and Anchorets have there been, who, after employing whole Days in Prayer, and whole Nights in Sighs and Groans, and holy Mourning; after bruiſing their Breaſts with Blows, and bathing their Eyes in Tears for their Sins and Frailties, have yet, in the midſt of theſe Smitings and Mortifications, fallen into moſt horrible Temptations and Diſorders?

Palladius Biſhop of *Helenopolis* (Vit. Patr. L. 8.) tells us, that One *Eron* a Hermite of *Alexandria*, lived ſeveral Years in ſo ſpiritual a Manner, that he continued ſometimes a Month together without taking any ſort of Nouriſhment, except what the Elements in the Lord's Supper gave him, and yet after all this, fell after ſo amazing a Degree, that he abandoned himſelf to all ſorts of Wickedneſs. All the World knows the Unhappineſs of *Eutyches*, whoſe Hereſie received much greater Reputation from the Character and Converſation of the Man, than from any extraordinary

Parts or Learning that he could pretend to. We read in *Sophronius*, that an Anchoret, called *Severian*, lived upon a Pillar near *Hierapolis* (as *Simeon Stylites* had done) and choſe this Retirement, that his auſtere Life might give Countenance to a Hereſie propagated by him. St. *Hilary* tells us, that the Emperour *Conſtantius*, built very magnificent Churches, and diſtributed great Treaſures among the Poor, that he might with a better Grace keep the Catholick Biſhops in Priſon, and cheriſh the *Arrian* Hereſie in his Dominions. So true is it, that the beſt Works without a right Principle, and ſincere Submiſſion to the Truth, are a very ſlippery and deceitful Foundation, to build our Hopes of future Happineſs upon. Even the bloodieſt Sacrifices of Fleſh and Blood, and moſt mercileſs Severities upon our Bodies, are mere Pomp and empty Form, ſuch as will ſtand us in no ſtead, if they be not attended and recommended with the Sacrifice of the Soul, and a Will entirely devoted to That of Almighty God.

Eccleſiæ tecta ſtruet, ut fidem deſtruat. Hil. lib. cont. Conſt. vita functum.

Since then ſo many eminent Perſons have miſcarried in this laborious Undertaking, and wandred from the right Way to Happineſs, by ſuch a falſe Confidence in their own extraordinary Virtues and Severities, as Humane Nature is exceeding apt to en-

entertain; since the Best and most Perfect Saints have humbled themselves before God, and cast all their Confidence upon his Mercy and Readiness to forgive; Who is there among us all, that can justifie any Confidence in himself or his own Performances? If the highest Cedars upon the Mountains quake and bend when the Storm gathers, what shall the Shrubs and Herbs of the Valleys do, and how shall these stand against the Fury of it? Let us then conclude, with the Apostle, that, Be we righteous, or be we otherwise, *Fear and Trembling* cannot but be a fit Qualification for us, in this great Work of our Salvation. For after all, the best and most effectual Caution a Christian can take to secure his great Concern, is, to distrust and think meanly of himself, and to be extremely sollicitous for the Event and good Acceptance of his most diligent and faithful Endeavours. The Truth is, A Man then begins to be enlightned, when he is made sensible of his own Blindness; and gathers Spiritual Strength, when he feels and laments his inward Weakness. But, because this Humble Distrust of one's self may degenerate into Despondency, and prove a fatal Hindrance and Discouragement, if not tempered and sustained by Trust and Hope in God; therefore my next Attempt shall be to make good this Point: And to

eſtabliſh that Truſt, by ſhewing, that the Work of Salvation is neither Impoſſible, nor exceeding Difficult, to Them that place their Hope in God, and rely ſtedfaſtly upon the Truth of his Word and Promiſe.

CHAP. IX.

The Encouragements to this Work, and Eaſineſs of ſucceeding in it.

HEre I am ſenſible, how open I lye to be attacked with an Objection, which in the foregoing Chapters I have furniſhed againſt my ſelf. For if the Way to Salvation be really ſo difficult, if the Dangers that await Men in it be ſo great, The Errours and Miſcarriages ſo many and ſo uſual, that a Man ought to take every Step with *Fear and Trembling*, and move, as if he were to travel over Snares and Precipices, then who at laſt can be ſaved? This was the very Difficulty, which the Apoſtles heretofore propoſed to the Son of God upon a like Occaſion, when he was explaining to them the Myſtery and the Conditions of everlaſting Happineſs. To which his Anſwer was, *The Things that are Impoſſible with Men, are Poſſible with God*, (Luke xviii. 27.)

And

And by these Words he strengthens our Hope, and gives us glorious Expectations. 'Tis very certain, I allow, that if the Salvation of Man were left entirely upon his own Hands, it would be an Undertaking which he by his proper Strength could never Accomplish; but What exceeds his single Power becomes not only possible but easie, when God vouchsafes to interpose his Assistance. To this St. *Paul* attributes the Glory of his Success, *Not I*, (says he) *but the Grace of God which was with Me*, (1 Cor. xv.) When therefore I advise a Distrust of our own Abilities, and such a Fear as may excite our Caution, you must understand me so, as at the same time to suppose me far from perswading to such a Panic Terrour, as should Represent our Endeavours vain, and our Case desperate. The Arm of God is Almighty, and one single Word of his can scatter all that oppose it. It is His part to raise us from Sin to Righteousness, to break our Chains, and enlighten our Darkness. Let us not then by false Reasonings seek a Pretence for Idleness, and think our selves at Liberty to be at no Trouble in this most important Affair. For *First* of all, God is willing and ready to save our Souls; and *Secondly*, There is no Hindrance on our part but what may be removed and vanquished; and *Thirdly*, The Undertaking, considered abstractedly and in

it ſelf, is not difficult. Theſe Three Conſiderations duly examined will ſet the Matter in its true Light, and prove a ſufficient Encouragement to thoſe, who are but too apt to form imaginary Hardſhips to themſelves, to excuſe their Perſeverance in this ſtrait and rough Way to Heaven.

As to the firſt of theſe Particulars, it is a Truth ſo fully and ſtrongly aſſerted in our Religion, that God is ſincerely deſirous of the Salvation of Mankind, that I cannot think it becomes me laboriouſly to prove it; Becauſe I ſuppoſe my ſelf addreſſing to Chriſtians, Such as are acquainted with, and aſſent to, the Goſpel. If any ſuch could ſtill be doubtful in this Point, he need only conſult St. *Paul* in his firſt Epiſtle to *Timothy*, whoſe whole Deſign preſuppoſes and proceeds upon this as an acknowledged Principle. The main Argument he inſiſts upon, why that Command ſhould be obeyed, of *making Prayers and Supplications for all Men*, but eſpecially for *Kings* and other Great Perſons, whoſe Condition in the World brings their Salvation into greateſt hazard, is This; That *God would have all Men to be ſaved*, (1 Tim. ii. 4.) The Rules of Morality laid down in the following parts of that Epiſtle, are built upon the ſame Foundation which he lays in his other Writings, and lays it ſo firm, as to leave no Ground of Doubt upon this Occaſion. *For God*

God (ſays he) *hath not appointed us unto Wrath, but to obtain Salvation by our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, (1 Theſſ. v. 8.) And indeed, After that the Son of God had taken upon him the Form of a Servant for this very Purpoſe, (as he argues elſewhere, *Phil.* ii.) after that eagerneſs and impatience which he expreſs'd to lay down his Life, and ſhed his Blood for us, that ſo he might Reconcile us to his Father, and take upon his own devoted Head the Strokes of that angry Juſtice, to which we were become liable; Who can queſtion the Sincerity of his Love? The Fervency of his Zeal was ſuch, that even that Thirſt, with which he ſeems ſo parched upon the Croſs, was but a feeble Repreſentation of the Ardent Deſire he had to ſecure our future Happineſs.

I ſhall not need to expatiate upon thoſe Bowels, and that tender Mercy, that more than Fatherly Compaſſion, (mentioned by *Zachary* in his Song of Praiſe, *Luke* i. 78.) which put him upon viſiting us in his Myſterious Incarnation. For what in truth hath not God, *rich in Mercy*, (as the Apoſtle ſtyles him, *Eph.* iii.) done, to convince us of his wonderful Kindneſs? What Condeſcenſions hath he thought too low to teſtifie his Deſire for our Good? That Patience and Forbearance which ſuffers our Imperfections; The wiſe Meaſures of his Providence, whereby he contrives that we ſhall

not be tempted above that we are able; Thoſe Diſpenſations to which he ſubmits to ſpare our Infirmities; the Slowneſs of his Juſtice in puniſhing our Offences; Thoſe preventing Graces by which he weans our Souls from Luſt and Sin; Thoſe Invitations and Rewards, by which he gives Life to our Hopes, and wins us over to Goodneſs; The paſſionate Complaints he makes by his Prophets, when Men refuſe to return to Him; The *Parables of the Loſt Sheep*, and the *Prodigal Son*, and thoſe other Significations of his Goodneſs and Affection; Thoſe Rejoycings, which diffuſe themſelves through the whole Court of Heaven upon the Converſion of a Sinner, and the infinite other Teſtimonies of his Tenderneſs for Souls, ought to be continual and powerful Motives to a truly filial Dependence upon ſo Good a Father; and do upbraid the inexcuſable Hardneſs of our Hearts, if we can ſtill be ſo inſenſible, ſo unworthy, as to queſtion, whether he truly love us. For this is that Shepherd in the Goſpel, who lays down his Life for the Sheep, (*John* x.) and ſuffers none of his Flock to wander and be loſt, without being ready to leave the other Ninety and Nine, who ſtand in leſs need of his Preſence, and run after that which is gone aſtray. This *laſtly* is He who declares the Eagerneſs of his Paſſion, by calling himſelf the Husband and Bridegroom

of

of our Souls, who invites us all to the Marriage-feaſt; and cannot without Indignation and ſenſible Concern obſerve the Perverſneſs and frivolous Pretences of thoſe who refuſe to come.

Whatever Marks of Severity he may upon Occaſion ſhew upon obſtinate Offenders, yet it is plain he threatens his Judgments long before, and gives Men timely Warning, on purpoſe that he may not execute them: And, ſo marvellous is his unſpeakable Goodneſs, that the weaker we are, the more careful and ſollicitous he is for us. The more of Danger there appears in the Diſeaſe, the more manifeſtly is his Power exerted in the Cure of it. For, be our Sins never ſo great, they have ſtill their determinate Number and Meaſure, but the Goodneſs of God knows no Bounds, no End. The depth of our Vileneſs and Guilt cannot exhauſt the Abyſs of his Mercy; and how wretched and abandoned ſoever the Sinner's Condition may be, ſtill this merciful Saviour ceaſes not to pity his miſerable State, becauſe he knows and kindly conſiders his extreme Impotence; and, moved by the exceeding Greatneſs of his Love, *he invites us to hope in his Mercy, even then when we provoke him to Wrath by ſtanding out againſt it.* He deſires our Happineſs much more than We our ſelves. He

Nos te provocamus ad iram; Tunos ad Miſericordiam. *L. 1. de viſit Infirm.*

begs

Deus te rogat, ut tui miſereāris, & non vis: cauſam apud te agit & non pateſt impetrare. Auguſt. Serm. 102. de Temp.

begs of us to have Compaſſion upon our ſelves, and not to draw down our own certain Ruine; and yet, alas! how often does he ask in vain, and ſue for that which he cannot prevail for, though our own Intereſt only be concerned in the Grant of it? And ſhall a Saviour ſo Dear, ſhall a Mediatour ſo Powerful, ſhall a God ſo inexpreſſibly full of Love, not find Credit enough with us, to create Hope and Truſt in Him? Shall He do ſo much for us, and ſhall we not believe, that he is in earneſt, and means all this for our Good? This is moſt extravagant; And therefore, having ſeen how God ſtands diſpoſed to our Salvation, I will not imagine any thing can be thought wanting on His Part; let us now proceed then to ſee how Matters ſtand with our ſelves.

II. Which is the Second Conſideration. And what ſhall we ſay, if even our Weakneſs it ſelf may be of uſe towards obtaining Heaven; if our very Miſeries are in ſome Senſe our Advantage? For if the Caſe be thus, what Obſtruction to our Happineſs can we reaſonably complain of from our ſelves? Let us have a care then of being diſcouraged by the Infirmities of our Fleſh, and the many Frailties of this mortal State: Let not the Inconſtancy of our Minds, or the Weakneſs of our Will terrifie and perplex

plex us. For if our Unworthineſs and Corruption, great as it is, did not yet hinder the Son of God from thinking us worth redeeming at the expence of ſo much Suffering; we need not fear, that our Miſery will be a Bar to the Accompliſhment of that glorious Work upon us. If our Wickedneſs and wilful Ingratitude did not make him abhor us, no doubt our involuntary Ignorances and Infirmities will not do it. We ſhall do well therefore to look upon the Mercies of God already conferred upon us, as a ſure Pledge of thoſe which he deſigns us to all Eternity. If our crying Sins ſound diſmally in our Ears and fill us with Dread, let us recollect, that the Son of God hath dyed upon the Croſs to deliver and cleanſe us from them. If our Impotence diſcourage us, let us remember, that they who can do leaſt, yet when ſtrengthened by Him, are able to do all things. It is our Weakneſs which miniſters Occaſion for the Glories and Triumphs of his Grace. The Publican in the Temple, who made no Difficulty to acknowledge his own Vileneſs, returned to his Houſe juſtified in that mean Opinion of himſelf. For even Sin and Weakneſs are converted into Inſtruments of Strength, and are often the Beginnings and Earneſts of Grace and great Perfection in a Chriſtian, when he hath the Ingenuity to own them, and to be humbled by the Reflection.

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You ſee to how little purpoſe it is, to object your Miſery and Guilt, when a ſincere Confeſſion of this is the Beginning of your Deſert, the firſt Step to Virtue, and the Ground-work of all your Hope. Nor will it be to more, to pretend that your Circumſtances and Buſineſs in the World incapacitate you for Salvation, when ſo many Inſtances are left upon record in Scripture, of Perſons converted from the worſt and moſt hazardous Employments. *Raab*, though a Harlot, came over from Idolatry to the true God. *Joſeph* preſerved his Chaſtity in *Egypt*. *Moſes* learnt Contempt of Worldly Greatneſs in a King's Court: A Publican became an Evangeliſt; a Perſecutor an Apoſtle: In ſhort, the frequent Converſions of notorious Sinners, are a ſufficient Demonſtration, that there is always at Hand, a Beam of Heavenly Light to guide Wanderers into the right Way; and ſome Sparks of Grace to warm the moſt frozen Hearts. God hath his particular Seaſons for Mercy, and our part muſt be to wait, and prepare our ſelves for them. From the inſtant that Men diſtruſt their own Strength, and feel their Spiritual Impotence and Blindneſs; that they look up to Heaven and humbly implore to be directed by a Light from above; placing their Hope entirely in the Merits of their Saviour; from that inſtant, I ſay, we may date their Return to God

God and the Right Way to Happineſs. This Truſt is like an inward Voice, that ſpeaks when all the reſt of their Faculties are dumb, and fails not to obtain whatever it asks. You will become ſtrong when you fly for Succour to Him, who (according to the Prophet (Iſai. xl.) *giveth Power to the Faint, and to them that have no Might he increaſeth Strength.*

Now you muſt underſtand, that this humble Confidence, which worketh Salvation, can proceed from no other Cauſe, than a Senſe of the Dangers wherewith we are encompaſs'd, and the abſolute Neceſſity we lye under of imploring and receiving continually Aſſiſtance from Him, who can do all things, and without whom We are our ſelves able to do nothing. This Diſpoſition alone is capable of raiſing us out of thoſe Depths and Diſtreſſes, into which Sin hath ſunk us. In ſuch Caſes God takes delight, *where Sin hath abounded, to make his Grace much more abound*, as St. *Paul* expreſſes it, (*Rom.* vi. 1.) and thinks his Honour concerned to work more Miracles for the reducing a Scandalous Offender from his loſt Eſtate, and reſcue him out of the Slavery of Sin, than he did ever to ſet his choſen People free from the Bondage of *Egypt*. O! the Darkneſs that muſt be ſcattered! O the Gulphs that muſt be paſs'd! O! the Deſarts and Rocks that muſt be travelled over before this

ſtray

ſtray Sheep can return and recover it ſelf! All thoſe Signs and Wonders wrought by *Moſes* in behalf of the *Iſraelites*, and to perfect a Temporal Deliverance, are but ſo many Types and Shadows of the mighty Workings of Omnipotence, for the inſtating Sinners in the glorious and eternal Liberty of the Sons of God. For, after all the Miſchief that our Errours can do us, This is ſtill our Comfort, that we belong to a Flock, whoſe kind Shepherd hath done ten thouſand times more to ſave us, than we have done, or could do, to deſtroy our ſelves. In ſhort, it will be very improper to object the Condition of our Affairs or any Incumbrances of Fortune in bar to our Salvation, when the Scripture hath ſo plainly directed us, how this Obſtruction may be prevented, by commanding, not, that worldly Cares be wholly laid aſide, but only that they be allowed their proper Place and Seaſon; And promiſing, that upon theſe Terms thoſe very Cares ſhall be bleſs'd and ſanctified to us; For this is the Purport of our Lord's Direction, *ſeek ye firſt the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs; and all Theſe things* (the neceſſary Supports of Life) ſhall *be added unto you*, (Matth. vi. 33.)

III. The Third Conſideration is, That This Affair of Salvation conſidered abſtractedly and in its own Nature, is not really hard to be compaſſed. *The King-*

dom

dom of God is within you, (ſays the Saviour of the World, *Luke* xvii. 20.) which ſome have underſtood to mean, *in your own Power*. And again, *Ask and ye ſhall have, ſeek and ye ſhall find, knock and it ſhall be opened unto you*, (Matth. vii. 7.) That is, ſet about the Buſineſs of your Salvation heartily, and you ſhall not miſcarry in the Undertaking. It is a *hidden* Treaſure, and not to be found without diligent Search. It is a *Pearl of great Price*, and therefore not to be had for nothing; But They who think it worth their while to buy it ſhall moſt aſſuredly have it. *All things are poſſible to him that believeth*, ſays our bleſſed Lord, (*Mark* ix. 23.) And the Difficulty of our Salvation is generally an Effect of the Weakneſs of our Faith. The Ways of Virtue are troubleſome and painful, but then they are ſo to ſuch only, as follow their own vain Inclinations; When a Man hath once gained that Point of reſiſting and vanquiſhing his Deſires, Sin from thence forward becomes full of Uneaſineſs and Horrour; and he can find no Charms in it. Virtue is eaſie and pleaſant to the reſolute and conſtant Practiſers of it; The Way is rugged, only to tender Feet, and timorous Hearts. This ſtrait Path grows broader and ſmoother as we advance farther in it; becauſe by Degrees we come to do thoſe things from a Principle of Love and Choice, which were done at firſt out of Fear, and

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by Conſtraint. The good Way becomes a Way of Sweetneſs, and Joy, and Peace to a ſincere Believer. His Confidence increaſes, and he calls up his Courage in proportion to the Difficulties that oppoſe his paſſage. He is ſo thoroughly perſwaded, that a Crown of everlaſting Glory cannot poſſibly coſt him too dear, that he eſteems the utmoſt he can do and ſuffer in order to obtaining it, as nothing in compariſon. By the Help of this Faith it is, that, from the very firſt ſetting out, he keeps his Eye fix'd upon the Prize at the End of the Race. Then it is, that Men begin to hate what they were formerly moſt fond of; and that God imparts himſelf ſenſibly to the Soul, by kindling there the Fire of his Love; and convincing us, that thus to hate our ſelves, is moſt truly to love both our ſelves and Him.

What is there indeed ſo painful and mortifying in a holy Life, which may not be ſoftned and made highly eligible by the Proſpect of that Recompence, which God hath promiſed to every faithful Chriſtian? What Murmurings can our Impatience, even under the ſharpeſt Sufferings, be provoked to, which may not be effectually ſuppreſs'd, when this Hope is once well ſettled in the Soul? After all, let us obſerve, what it is that God requires; and then conſider well, whether there be any ſuch mighty Difficulty

ty in it, as Men commonly pretend. *He commands nothing out of our Power to do, and he only desires, that we would consult our own true Advantage,* says *Hugo de St. Victor.* If the Yoke he lays upon us were heavy, if the Law of the Gospel were arbitrary and unprofitable, our Laziness might have some plausible Pretence; but he asks no more than a Will resigned to his wiser Will, and a Heart inflamed with his Love: And can there be any Demand more reasonable? Does not he deserve all this? *What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, and to walk in his Ways, and to love him?* (says *Moses* to the Children of *Israel, Deut.* x. 12.) But when this same God makes us a Proffer of his Eternal Kingdom, upon Terms so easie, as to declare it purchaseable with a Piece of Bread given to the Poor, can any Man be excused, who refuses to make such a Saving Bargain? says *Peter Chrysologus.* It is not by Miracles, or by Instances of an exalted and uncommon Virtue, or by Works of a very magnificent Charity, or by extraordinary Mortifications, or by renouncing the World and fleeing into Caves and Deserts, or by Austerities

Non exigitur a nobis nisi quod nostrum est, & quod bonum nostrum. *L.* 1. *de Sacr.*

Dare regnum suum fragmento panis vendit, quis excusare poterit non memorem, quem tanta vilitas venditionis accusat? Serm. 41. de Jejun. & Eleem.

ſterities that ſhock the Power of Humane Nature only, that we muſt make our Way to Heaven. St. *Matthew* hath told us, that in the laſt great Day, *Many ſhall ſay to the Lord, Lord, have not we propheſied in thy Name, and in thy Name have caſt out Devils, and in thy Name done many wonderful Works?* To whom he will make anſwer, that *he knows them not*, (Matth. vii. 22, 23.)

They are Virtues of a common ſize and capacity, which generally carry Men to Heaven; and all the Mortification neceſſary to recommend and render them effectual, is only that they be animated with a lively Faith, and an humble Hope in God's Mercy and Acceptance. The Man who lives like his Neighbours, and continues under the Engagements of worldly Buſineſs and Converſation, provided he live piouſly, and perſevere in faithful Obedience to God, and be careful to diſcharge the Duties of that Station, in which Providence hath placed him, may ſay at laſt with *David*, *The Lord ſhall reward me after my righteous Dealing, according to the Cleanneſs of my Hands ſhall he recompence me, Becauſe I have kept the Ways of the Lord, and dealt uprightly before him*, (Pſal. xviii.) Every humble modeſt Widow, that hath renounced the Vanity of the World, and devoted her ſelf to God, may lye proſtrate before his Altar, and cry out with *Judith*, that God heareth the

the Prayers of the Afflicted, and is a Saviour of Them that are without Strength or Hope: The Afflicted Man, that will exalt his Voice, and make the Prayers he pours out in Adversity to be heard, and with *Job* quietly wait till his great Change come: It is the honest good plain Man, that Exhorts and Incites his Neighbours to Works of Piety and Virtue like *Tobias*: It is the Poor, like Him mentioned by the wise Man, who walked in the Uprightness of his Heart, and is more to be esteemed than those Possessours of Great Riches, who mount to Greatness by indirect Ways: It is the devout Christian in his Cell, who meditates in the Law of his God Day and Night; and, after contracting his Affairs into a narrow Compass, is, (like that Servant in the Gospel, *Matth.* xxv.) set over many things, because he had been faithful in a few things: It is the Woman of Condition, who convinces her self of the Vanity of the World, and hath discharged all Care of rendring her self agreeable to any but God only; that sets her Hope and Affections upon a future Life, and from thence hath attained to a just and generous Contempt of This: 'Tis the honest pious devout Christian, in short, who contents himself with that Perfection, which is proper to his Capacity; and perswaded that God is better pleased with a common Virtue in the Way of a Man's Pro-

Profeſſion, than with ſomewhat more extraordinary, in a Method which he never called him to: Theſe are the Perſons that go to Heaven. For in truth there is no ſurer Courſe of getting thither, than by being faithful and diligent in the Works of our reſpective Vocations.

We read in *Palladius*, that *Paphnutius*, after a very auſtere Life in the Wilderneſs, deſired of God, that he would let him know, if there was any Man like him: Whereupon an Angel informed him, That hard by, in the City of *Heraclea*, there was a poor Piper, that got his Living by that Trade, every whit as good a Man as himſelf. Something like this is reported of two Hermits in the Lives of the Fathers; Who, after a long time ſpent in the moſt profound Solitude, and living in the Body without the Deſires of the Body; treating themſelves with all the Severities of a moſt mortified Repentance, and utterly diſengaging their Minds from every thing here below, they bethought themſelves to enquire of God, whether there were any where in the World, Perſons ſo reſigned, ſo heavenly-minded, ſo every way perfect, as They. The Angel, which appeared to them, did not put them to the trouble of going far to find their Match; He told them, that upon the Confines of that very Deſart, there were a Shepherd and a Shepherdeſs, who,

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by looking diligently to their Flock, living in the World, but living there with Humility, and a ſtrict Regard to their Duty, were more acceptable to Almighty God, than They two with all their affected Solitude and ſuppoſed Perfection.

The Uſe I would make of this is, That every Man ſhould apply himſelf with all his Might to fill the Poſt to which God hath appointed him; that Aſpiring to Perfection in this Capacity is more agreeable to God's Will, and better approved of him, than ſeeking to advance to higher degrees of Goodneſs, in Methods of our own affecting, ſuch as are ſingular and out of the common road of living; and, that Innocency of Life, and Sincerity of Heart, are really the moſt valuable of all Perfections. For God, who is a ſimple Being, delights in Souls that reſemble him in Simplicity; and, provided that good Diſpoſition be not wanting, he will be ſure to reward their leaſt pompous Virtues with an incorruptible Crown. He meaſures not Mens Deſerts by outward Shew and Circumſtances, but hath promiſed Paradiſe to a Cup of cold Water, when given for his ſake. This gave occaſion to that Remark of St. *Paul*, that, when he conſidered the ſlight Troubles of the preſent Life, and the Recompence deſigned for them hereafter, he could not find any ſort of proportion between

these lighter Afflictions which are but for a moment, and that eternal and far *more exceeding weight of Glory, which they work out for us*, (2 Cor. iv. 17.) Ah! says St. *Bernard*, If our least Actions, short and transient as they seem, be yet capable of becoming the Seeds of a blessed Eternity; If one Moment can entitle us to a Reward, that shall abide for ever, what Stupidity is it to lose, I do not say so long a time, but such an Eternity of Happiness and Glory, which we have it in our power to qualifie our selves for?

Non transeunt opera nostra ut videntur, sed temporalia quæque veluti æternitatis semina jaciuntur. Bern. Serm. 25. ad Cler.

But, If this Glory do not yet affect us so sensibly as it ought, yet at least let the Easiness of securing it to our selves encourage our Diligence. Our Minds might be capable of very Great Things, if we would but accustom them to despise Little ones: And we should find no difficulty in relishing Heavenly Joys, if we did once refine our Taste by weaning our Affections from those upon Earth. Happy are They indeed, to whom it is given, to know the Mysteries of the Kingdom of God. And, in good truth, this World, which is no better than Corruption, this Earth, so full of Miseries, this Life, which is one continued Scene of Sufferings and Sorrows, is infinitely mistaken, when we suppose it eligible, above that Bliss

Bliſs which the Power and Goodneſs of God hath prepared for his faithful choſen Servants. Have ſo many Martyrs gladly purchaſed This at the Expence of their Blood? Have ſo many zealous Souls ſo reſolutely renounced even their lawful Pleaſures and Enjoyments? Have ſo many Believers forſaken all, and followed Chriſt, that they might have Treaſure in Heaven, and ſhall We think much to ſerve him in our reſpective Stations? Shall we grudge the very Superfluities of Life, and not give that which would only feed our Luxury to the Saviour of the World, when he calls upon us to relieve his hungry and diſtreſs'd Members? For though we be Sinners, yet the Prophet hath aſſured us, (*Iſai.* lviii.) *that if we deal our Bread to the Hungry, and cover the Naked with a Garment, our Light ſhall break forth as the Morning, and our Health ſhall ſpring up ſpeedily; and our Righteouſneſs ſhall go before us, and the Glory of the Lord ſhall be our Rere-ward.*

For now is the Time of Clemency and Mercy, and therefore it will behove us to husband theſe precious Moments, with a true Chriſtian Prudence, while the Day of Grace and good Acceptance, during this ſhort Life, continues. Jeſus Chriſt, at his firſt appearance, came not to condemn the World, but to ſave the World, (*John* iii. 17.) Let us prevent the Terrours of his ſe-

cond Coming, while we may, and provide for that Day of Wrath, in which he ſhall appear again in the Brightneſs of his Majeſty, and exalt the Standard of his Croſs, with a Luſtre excelling that of the Sun in the Firmament. Then ſhall that Glorious Croſs, which is become the Inſtrument of Salvation to Mankind, declare to all the World the unſpeakable Love of Him, who ſuffered himſelf to be faſtned to it for the ſake of wretched Mortals, and convince us, that He hath left nothing on his part undone, that might contribute to our Happineſs. The Scandal of this Croſs ſhall then be done away, and all that Wiſdom and Power of God appear, which was exerted in the myſterious Work of our Redemption. Let us then follow the Apoſtle's Advice, and with *an humble Confidence approach the Throne of Grace*, (Heb. iv.) *that we may find Mercy in time of need*, and all thoſe Helps neceſſary for a Holy Life. A Life, whoſe great Difficulties are now removed, ſince the Son of God hath diſarmed the Powers of Hell and the World, by his meek Life, and ignominious Death. If theſe Conſiderations are not ſufficient to encourage us in the Way to Salvation, which is ſo ſmoothned by the Aſſiſtances we receive from above, and hath no Hardſhips left, but ſuch as are owing to our own Weakneſs and Irreſolution; If this Undertaking, ſoftned by our

our Lord, and eaſie in its own Nature, do not encourage us, I am ſure it ought to fill our Souls with Terrour and Amazement. For what Puniſhment, what Vengeance can be too ſevere, for thoſe Wretches who neglect ſo glorious a Reward; and that ſuch a Reward as they may with ſo much eaſe attain to? What Torments are too exquiſite, what Flames too hot, for thoſe obſtinate abandoned Sinners, who, when God hath put Salvation in their own choice, and afforded them ſuch powerful Encouragements and Advantages, do yet chooſe Miſery, and will not be perſwarded not to Ruine themſelves?

CHAP. X.

That in order to our own Salvation, we ought to contribute to the Salvation of Others.

NOw, If we are, as I hope by this time we are, abundantly perſwaded of how great Importance, this Affair of Salvation is, and the dreadful Conſequence of our Negligence in it; let us loſe no time, but from this Inſtant enter upon ſuch a Courſe of Life, as may, by making the beſt of that ſmall Remainder of Days we have

to ſpend here, effectually prevent our Dying eternally hereafter. Let us labour to ſecure this Everlaſting Reſt to our ſelves, which our Religion hath indented for, and deliver our Souls from thoſe vain Diſquiets and anxious Cares, which a Life of little or no continuance would involve us in. But let us obſerve, firſt of all, that it is not ſufficient for Men to confine all their Endeavours after Happineſs to themſelves, for they are obliged to contribute to the ſaving Others too. The true Chriſtian cannot think of being bleſſed alone, but teaches others, which way they may be ſo too. He is much of the Diſpoſition, that *Eucherius* profeſſes in his Epiſtle to *Valerian*; *I cannot* (ſays he) *think of my own Salvation, without being at the ſame time ſollicitous for Yours; for I look upon You as my Other ſelf, and love you accordingly.* And indeed, when a Man hath true Faith, he labours to unite himſelf to his Fellow-Chriſtians, that, like ſo many living Stones, mutually ſupporting each other, and built upon Jeſus Chriſt the Corner-ſtone, they may form a Holy Temple to the Honour of their God and Saviour. For We are obliged by that Zeal for God's Glory, which ought to be a great and governing Principle with us, to labour as much as poſſibly we can, that the Number of Partakers

Cum Te æque ac me diligam, neceſſe eſt ut ſummum bonum aſſe qui Te, tanquam me alterum cupiam. *Epiſt. ad Valer.*

takers in our Glory may be increaſed; and to engage our Brethren to bear a part in that holy Conſort of Angels and Saints, where the Praiſes of their Redeemer are continually ſung, and God is bleſſed for Evermore. And theſe Endeavours we are bound to uſe on Their behalf, not only becauſe we all travel the ſame Way, and deſign for the ſame Place, and are of the ſame Flock, and all acknowledge the ſame common Shepherd, but for our own ſakes too; becauſe by aſſiſting in the Salvation of Thoſe with whom we converſe, we ſhall beſt promote and ſecure our own. For nothing, to be ſure, can more effectually recommend us to the good Graces and favourable Acceptance of our Saviour, than the imitating his great Work, and becoming Saviours to others, ſo far as we are capable of it, by imparting to Them holy Advice and wholeſome Inſtructions, and edifying them by good Examples.

Of this admirable Charity to Mens Souls it is, that St. *Paul* is to be underſtood, when he tells the *Corinthians* (1 Ep. xii. 31.) that he would *ſhew unto them a more excellent Way*, better than the moſt aſtoniſhing Powers and beſt Gifts of the Spirit, for the rendring them perfect, and bringing them to Heaven. And if Love and Charity be this Way, can That be better expreſs'd, than by enlightning their Minds with that

Divine Grace from Heaven, the leaſt Ray whereof ſcatters and eclipſes all earthly Objects? than by diſabuſing them, and drawing off their Affections from Viſible Things, that they may be fixed upon ſuch as are Inviſible and Eternal? than by convincing Men how infinitely vain, how mere a nothing thoſe pretended Advantages are, which miſtaken Wretches hold in higheſt Eſtimation; and raiſing their Souls to that truly generous Courage and Greatneſs of Soul, which Chriſtianity commends and teaches, which conſiſts in deſpiſing all that appears terrible to Senſe, and making *Him* the only Object of our Fear, who, when he hath killed, can caſt into Hell, and puniſh with an everlaſting Deſtruction? In a word, to ſet before them all thoſe Arguments, which may open their Eyes, and teach them the Life of good Chriſtians here, and that of bliſsful Saints hereafter? This is the only real Good a Soul is capable of receiving from us, and the moſt beneficial Proof of Affection and ſincere Kindneſs, that One Chriſtian can poſſibly give to Another.

With this Love the Son of God was enflamed, when he condeſcended to dye upon the Croſs, for the Redemption of Mankind; With This the Hearts of his Apoſtles burn'd, when they travelled throughout the World, to teach all Nations this Myſtery, and Preach the Kingdom of God; And by the

the mighty Power of this Love, they were inſpired with Reſolution to drink their Maſter's Cup, and lay down their Lives too for the Brethren. For when a Man hath once true Faith, this will convince him of what infinite Importance and Benefit the Saving of Souls is; and that Perſwaſion cannot but kindle a holy Zeal, to attempt the procuring the ſame Infinite Good to our Neighbour, which we own of ſuch ineſtimable Value, and abſolute Neceſſity to our Selves. Were Men but duly affected with this Senſe, it is not to be conceived, that our Societies trading to the *Indies* ſhould be ſo extremely Greedy and take ſuch Pains, for the Riches of thoſe Countries, and yet ſo much ſuffer the Merchant to ſwallow up the Chriſtian, as to take no Care of Planting the Goſpel among them. Happy no doubt are They, who out of a ſincere Love to Truth, and Charity to Them who remain ignorant of it, ſet their Hands to this good Work. For how can Men, who profeſs themſelves Diſciples of *Jeſus Chriſt*, ſee theſe poor Wretches, who are a part of his Kingdom, and not pity their Errours, nor lend them their Aſſiſtance, and lead them to the Truth, ſince God hath expreſly by the Prophet, (*Pſal.* 11.) given to his Son the *Heathen for his Inheritance* and the utmoſt Parts of the Earth for his Poſſeſſion, and ſince that Son hath likewiſe acquired a full

Title to them, by the Purchaſe and Conqueſt of his Triumphant Death? This, if I may be allowed ſo bold an Expreſſion, would be in ſome ſenſe to Save our Saviour himſelf; when we thus gather up and bring in the Price of his Blood, ſcattered and loſt in the dark and diſtant Corners of the Earth. And this we do, when we make the Light of Truth to ſhine, among thoſe miſerable Creatures, to whom the Revelation of the Goſpel is not imparted, as (bleſſed be God) it is to Us.

If then Men have a true Zeal for the Glory of Jeſus, and the Intereſt of his Blood, they ſhould expreſs it by their Diligence to bring his loſt Sheep into the Fold; And ſuch as have the Light of the Goſpel lifted up upon them, cannot more worthily teſtifie their Gratitude for ſo great a Bleſſing, than by improving every fair Occaſion of Delivering thoſe from their Miſery, whom the thick Night of Ignorance hath overſpread. For every good Servant will naturally endeavour to ſpread the Knowledge, and advance the Honour of his Maſter as far as he can.

But alas! we need not croſs the Seas, and travel to the remoteſt Parts of the World for Opportunities to exerciſe this Zeal. The Infidelity and Wickedneſs of the Age we live in, hath cut us out Work more than enough nearer Home. And therefore

fore we ſhall do well to begin with Inſtructing and Converting thoſe with whom we daily Converſe. Let us then ſecure our Own eternal Advantage, by labouring earneſtly for Theirs; and take care, that the Light of Grace ſhed abroad in our Hearts, may reflect at leaſt back upon thoſe, who dwell within the reach of its Activity. Let us try to bring into the Way of Truth our Friends and Neighbours that have erred and are deceived, and reſcue them from thoſe Ravening Wolves in Sheeps Clothing, thoſe Falſe Prophets, whoſe Gain is their Godlineſs. Let us conſider all Chriſtians with regard to their Common Saviour, and lay aſide all thoſe partial Diſtinctions, which different Circumſtances in the World, and other carnal Conſiderations, are uſed to make. When we make our Saviour and his Doctrine truly underſtood, we add to his Glory; When we convert Sinners from the Errour of their Ways, and bring over more Subjects to the Obedience of Chriſt, we enlarge the Borders of his Kingdom. What indeed can we do more acceptable to God, than to contribute towards the Saving of Souls, ſince this is, as I ſaid, in ſome ſenſe our ſelves to become the Saviours of our Saviour himſelf? For, if when *we viſit them that are in Priſon*, if when *we feed the Hungry*, and *clothe the Naked*, Jeſus Chriſt interprets the Kindneſſes done to *the*

least of these his Brethren, as *done to His own* Person, (*Matth.* xxv.) how can we imagine but he will pass the same favourable Construction, upon the Services we do to the Souls of sinful and mistaken Men?

We observe Men generally very tenderly affected with the Death of the Body, when This happens to some poor Wretch destitute of Friends and Succour; or to a Malefactor, upon whom the Law executes just Punishment: But very Few are concerned for the Loss and Eternal Ruine of infinite Souls, who live in Dissoluteness and Debauchery, and are undone by a wicked Compliance with the Corruptions of a degenerate World. We should make it a Point of Duty and Conscience, to relieve the Afflicted and Oppressed, or to guide a blind Man into the right Way; and shall we be so Cruel, so Insensible, as to suffer the Persons we converse with to live and dye in dangerous Errours? Shall we be deaf to that Advice of the Apostle, which calls upon us to lend a helping Hand to these Wretches, and pluck them out of that Everlasting Fire, which is prepared for a Punishment of their Crimes? (*Jude* 23.)

Let us reflect upon that Prince of Darkness, how extreme vigilant and industrious this Common Enemy of God and Man is; how much more Pains He takes to destroy Mens Souls, than We do to save them,

them, (1 *Pet.* v. 8.) No Condition of Life is ſo deſpicable, no Fortune ſo mean, no Soul ſo vile, that he does not think it worth his while to deſtroy it. All Circumſtances are equal, all Places indifferent to Him, provided he can but compaſs his wicked and malicious Purpoſes. The very Extremity of thoſe Torments, which increaſe in proportion as his pernicious Deſigns ſucceed, do not abate one whit of that Eagerneſs he hath to do Miſchief. And what do We, who believe the Goſpel, We, whoſe Character and juſteſt Commendation conſiſts in the Love of our Brethren, and an indefatigable Zeal for their Good and God's Honour; What I ſay, do We do like this, in our Endeavours to promote Mens Happineſs? How far are We from concerning our ſelves with their Behaviour? What Aſſiſtances do we extend to them by our Prayers or good Counſel? With what Indifference do We behold the fatal Errours and moſt profligate Manners of our neareſt Relations and moſt intimate Friends? How can this Coldneſs agree with our Profeſſion, and with what Face can we pretend to be Chriſtians, while our Faith is ſo very feeble and unactive?

If St. *Paul* declares that *Man worſe than an Infidel, who provides not for them of his own Houſe*, (1 Tim. v. 8.) what Judgment muſt we make of ſuch as uſe their Relations, only

only for Inſtruments of gratifying their Paſſions, Tools to their Vices, and make them their Companions, and Coadjutors in Wickedneſs? What can we think of Thoſe who corrupt their Brethren by ill Examples? How great muſt be Their Condemnation, who deſtroy thoſe Souls, which Providence hath committed to their Charge and Direction, on purpoſe that they might lead them into the Ways of Holineſs and Eternal Glory? They are appointed by God to feed their Children with the Bread of Life, and, inſtead of this, they poyſon them with corrupt Principles. And what will become of that Flock whoſe very Shepherd goes aſtray? How ſevere a Puniſhment muſt needs await thoſe Guides, who ought to be the *Salt* and *Light of the World*, and yet inſtead of enlightning the Blind add to their Darkneſs; inſtead of preſerving thoſe under their Care from Corruption, are the firſt and chief Inſtruments of corrupting them? Theſe are *thoſe wandring Stars* mentioned by St. *Jude*, (Verſe 13.) which propagate Darkneſs inſtead of Light: Theſe the Clouds, which rain down Storms and Fire, where they ought to ſhed refreſhing Showers and gentle Dew. Againſt theſe falſe and blind Guides it is, that the Prophet *Ezekiel* diſcharges the Heat of his Zeal, when he ſpeaks to them in the Name of the Lord after this manner, (Ch. xxxiv.) *Ye eat*

the

the Fat, and clothe you with the Wool; ye kill them that are fed, but ye feed not the Flock. The Diſeaſed have ye not ſtrengthened, neither have ye healed that which was ſick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye ſought that which was loſt. Therefore Behold I am againſt the Shepherds, and I will require my Flock at their Hand, ſaith the Lord God. I omit the other Threatnings of the Prophet againſt the negligent Shepherds which are alſo very terrible. For nothing is more provoking to Almighty God, than the Indifference of Thoſe Perſons, whoſe Station requires a more than ordinary Zeal. And the Inference from hence is very natural and juſt, That, ſince labouring to promote the Salvation of others is ſo very acceptable to God, and ſo beneficial to our ſelves, the being unconcern'd for other Mens Happineſs muſt needs be a dangerous Obſtruction to our own.

But however, ſince the moſt effectual Method of advancing the Glory of God is to aſſiſt Others in the Works of Virtue and Salvation, This is the leaſt we can poſſibly do, to take good heed, that if we do them no good by our Advice, we may be ſure to do them no hurt by our Example.

But, ſince the Exorbitance of the preſent Age is ſo exceſſive, that no former Times perhaps can furniſh us with a Parallel; ſince

ſince even Probity and Common Honeſty are almoſt utterly loſt and extinct among Men; ſince Profaneneſs and Irreligion is become ſo general, that the Scandal of it is come up to the very Altar; let us arm our ſelves with all the Power of that godly Zeal, which Chriſtian Charity inſpires, to reduce our Brethren that indulge themſelves in wicked Courſes. Let us with a Holy Confidence ſet our ſelves againſt that Impiety, which is getting ground ſo faſt in their Hearts. Let us harden our Faces, and ſtand in the Gap againſt that impetuous Torrent of Cuſtom, which bears down ſo many weak unwary Souls. Let us oppoſe the vicious Examples of the Rich and Great, by which the Men of inferiour Condition are perverted, and Sin is not only countenanced but authorized. Let us teach Believers to withſtand the overflowing Debauchery of Manners and Principles, by calling up thoſe Remains of Faith, now ſo hard to be met with in the World. Let us pray for the better Underſtanding of Them, who are overborn with carnal Conſiderations, and by a vicious and miſtaken Modeſty ſhamed out of Virtue, at a time when Vice is grown into Reputation. Let the Preachers of the Goſpel brandiſh the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and make it glitter in the Eyes of Sinners more fiercely than ever. Let them arm their People with

with all the Terrours of Religion, and every thing that can awaken Men out of their ſpiritual Slumber; Let them diſplay the Judgments of God in their moſt affrighting Form, that the moſt Hardned may hear, and fear and tremble. But let them be careful too to do this ſo dexterouſly, that an indiſcreet Rigour may not diſcourage the Feeble. When Men ſpeak in Publick, Severity will become them, becauſe the general Rules of Living muſt make Perfection their Aim; but when they confer in Private, ſome Condeſcenſions are neceſſary, becauſe then there is a Regard due to the Infirmities of particular Perſons. We cannot be too zealous againſt Sin; but then that Zeal muſt be tempered with Patience, and the Apoſtle directs, that Sinners ſhould be *inſtructed in Meekneſs*, (2 Tim. ii. 25.) Let them conſider they have Men to deal with, and treat them with Humanity. Let the Senſe and Experience of our own Infirmities move Compaſſion towards thoſe of other People. And eſpecially let us beware, leſt by too rugged a Behaviour, and too fierce and frightful Repreſentations of Virtue, we diſmay thoſe that are well diſpoſed to it. Let us, in a word, obſerve the mighty Condeſcenſions of our Bleſſed Saviour, and how he accommodated himſelf and his Diſcourſes, to the ſeveral Circumſtances of the Perſons, whom he laboured to win over to the Truth.

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Parlicularly let us reflect upon that Method of His, (*John* xvii. 19.) *For their ſakes I ſanctifie my ſelf, that they alſo might be ſanctified in the Truth.* He taught them Perfection by his own Example. And herein we muſt imitate him, by going before Men in that Way to Salvation, which we would perſwade them to. The moſt likely Courſe of prevailing with our Neighbours to do Well, is to let them ſee thoſe ſhining Virtues in our own Converſations, which we endeavour to recommend; To convince, and to inſtruct them by, that moſt effectual of all Arguments, our Actions. We muſt become perfect, if we hope to make others ſo. This is more eſpecially the Duty of Them who have the Care of Souls; and the Office of a Guide is not duly, is not regularly, diſcharged, except he be a Pattern as well as a Director. Let our Behaviour then confirm our Diſcourſes; and our Practice illuſtrate and declare the Truth of our Principles. We muſt begin with plucking the Beam out of our own Eyes, and convert our ſelves in order to the Converſion of our Brethren. Good Men alone are duly qualified to promote Goodneſs effectually in others. The Blemiſhes of Spiritual Guides are a moſt unhappy Obſtacle to their Labours, and of pernicious Conſequence to the Souls intruſted with them. And that Bleſſing from above, from which alone thoſe La-

Labours can derive Succeſs, is uſually obtained by an inviolable Fidelity, and diligent Improvement of Grace in our own Conduct. We ſhall then be proper and perfect Inſtruments of God's Glory in the Zeal we employ for the Souls of our Fellow-Chriſtians, when the ſame Impreſſions appear lively and ſtrong upon our ſelves, which we endeavour to make upon Them. Let Us then be firſt Diſabuſed, and get above the Vanities of this World, that we may reſcue others from Deluſion; and *let our Light ſhine before Men*, clear and bright, that *ſeeing our good Works they may glorifie our Father which is in Heaven*, by endeavouring to be like us *in all manner of all holy Converſation and Godlineſs*. For this is the Way to ſave both our ſelves, and thoſe that hear us.

CHAP.

CHAP. XI.

The Concluſion of this whole Treatiſe.

IF after all that hath been ſaid, we are not yet ſufficiently made ſenſible, of the infinite Importance and Neceſſity, of labouring with our utmoſt Might to obtain Eternal Salvation, What can perſwade, What can convince us? Shall this active Soul of ours be content to continue ignorant in a Matter, where our Great, our only True Intereſt is concerned; and blind to its own ſtate, when it cannot endure to be ſo to any thing elſe? What can we imagine will become of us at laſt, if we be not rightly informed, either of the Way by which, or the Place whither, we ought to go? Or Who will ſhew us any real Good, if the Light of God's Countenance, and the Impreſſions of his Grace have not been able to diſcover it to us? Are our Capacities ſo feeble, or our Thoughts ſo looſe and inconſiſtent, that they cannot embrace a Truth, which muſt be comprehended, only by long and continued Reflections? Or is not rather our inordinate Fondneſs for Temporal Happineſs the true account, why we have ſo little Affection and Eſteem for that

Sic animus humanus cæcus latere vult, ſe autem ut lateat aliquid nem vult? Aug. Conf. l. 10. c. 23.

that Eternal one, which is infinitely better?

There want not Arguments, 'tis plain, to ſhew the Folly of thus miſplacing our Love; But, if neither the Inconſtancy of the things themſelves; nor the Uncertainty of Life, that ſtrongeſt Tenure by which we can hold them; if that fleeting Scene of worldly Greatneſs, the falſe Glitter of the Vanities we doat on, the Emptineſs and Deceit of all here below, if this Cheat, this almoſt Univerſal Impoſture of Fleſh and Blood, are Reaſons too weak to diſengage our Hearts from Earth and its Follies; yet at leaſt let the Pretenſions we have to Heaven, the Adoption of the Sons of God, the Proſpect of an Everlaſting Kingdom in Reverſion; the Reconciliation made between the Creatour and his Creatures; the Participation of the Merits of Jeſus Chriſt; the ineſtimable Worth of his Blood ſhed for us; the glorious Promiſes of the Goſpel; and that incomprehenſible Bliſs prepared for the Elect, be Motives powerful enough for raiſing our Souls to Heaven, and enflaming them with ardent and ſincere Deſires of Salvation. And what indeed can make Impreſſion upon us, if ſuch forcible Conſiderations as theſe are not able to do it? How long ſhall we dote upon the Darkneſs and thick Shades of this gloomy Life; and by a wretched Stupidity prefer the ignominious

nious Slavery of *Egypt* before the glorious Liberty of the Children of Light? If we be not convinced of the Neceſſity of this Great Concern, let us beg of God to give us Eyes of Faith, that we may ſee and underſtand. But if we believe, that we ought to ſecure this Point, why do we not apply our ſelves to the Work, and live in conformity to our Belief? The Goſpel hath told us, (*Matth.* vii. 26.) that every one *who heareth the Truth and doth it not, is like unto a fooliſh Man, which built his Houſe upon the Sand; And the Rain deſcended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that Houſe, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.* Let us therefore be very ſerious in this Matter; and, ſince we are called to a glorious Eternity, let us treat all periſhing and temporary Objects, with the Contempt they deſerve. For what a Reproach is it, that Souls, ſo exalted, as Ours are or ought to be with the Hopes of Heaven, ſhould ſtill be groveling in the Duſt, and creep like the vileſt Inſects upon Earth and ſenſual Delights?

Let us reflect how vain all that Glory is, which here we ſo eagerly purſue; how ſhort that Moment, which we ſottiſhly prefer before Eternity. And, ſince the only ſolid and ſubſtantial Thing in This Life is the Care of Another, and the ſecuring our Future Happineſs; let us learn, that the higheſt

higheſt Pitch of Humane Wiſdom, and the very Perfection of Chriſtian Perfection, is to renounce and deſpiſe the Preſent, in expectation of That which is to come. But which, when once come, ſhall never have an End. In ſhort, that the Beſt, the Only good Thing we can do, is to lead a pure and pious Life, and to finiſh it with a holy Death.

If our Hearts be ſtill weak and liable to be perverted by the Uſe of worldly Conveniences, and the great Variety of Accidents to which we ſtand daily expoſed; Let us *ſtrengthen our ſelves in the Profeſſion of our Faith*, remembring that *He is faithful, who hath promiſed*, as St. *Paul* exhorts, (*Heb.* x. 23.) Let us wait with humble Submiſſion, and reſpectful Silence, for the Concluſion of this Exile and Miſery, to which Sin hath condemned us for a Seaſon; being *Followers of thoſe Great Good Men, who through Faith and Patience inherit the Promiſes*; as the ſame Apoſtle adviſes, (*Heb.* vi. 12.) Let us tread in the Steps of that Holy Patriarch, mentioned in that Epiſtle, (Ch. xi.) whoſe Excellence and Commendation it was, that he conſtantly bore Heaven in his Eye, as the true Country of Promiſe, of which *Canaan* in the Old Teſtament was but a very feeble Repreſentation. For this Proſpect, and this Hope, is of it ſelf capable of being a ſufficient Defence and Encouragement againſt any

any Afflictions of the preſent Life. Let us bewail the length of this tedious Pilgrimage, and think it an Unhappineſs, that we are ſtill condemned to Exile, and long for our Reception to our own Country. Let us behave our ſelves like Travellers (for ſuch in effect we are here below) who ſupport the Badneſs of the Ways, and the Inclemency of the Weather, and all the other Inconveniences they meet with upon their Journy, content with the Hopes of Reſt and Eaſe when they reach Home; And let us, even from our Sufferings, take Courage and Comfort, becauſe Afflictions are the ready Way to Heaven. If Adverſity diſcompoſe us, let us draw off our Affections from periſhing and tranſitory Objects, and place them upon ſuch as are fixt and eternal. Let us not perplex our Thoughts with the myſterious Methods of Providence, by which God chooſes to bring Good Men to himſelf through rugged and difficult Ways; For if Misfortunes, like a ſtrong Gale, drive them ſo much ſooner into Port, where is the juſt Cauſe of Complaint? Nor let thoſe Pleaſures, which the Proſperous find here below, amuſe us, but rather let us imitate the ancient *Jews*, who could find no Pleaſures by the Waters of *Babylon* ſo entertaining, but that they bewailed their Captivity notwithſtanding, and earneſtly wiſhed for

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a Return into their own Country. Let Us, like Them, ſigh and pant after the true *Canaan*, and run with freſh redoubled Eagerneſs to the End of our Race, without ſuffering any thing we meet with in our Paſſage to divert us from the right Courſe. Let us quicken our Pace, and add to our Diligence for the time to come, in proportion to our paſt Errours and Neglects, and make amends for the precious Opportunities we have loſt, as the terrible Day of the Lord approaches nearer to us. *Let us caſt away*, (as St. *Paul* adviſes *Rom.* xiii. 13.) *the Works of Darkneſs, and let us put on the Armour of Light*, and let us walk while we have Day, for fear the Night ſurpriſe, and take us unprovided. Let us be ready for *the Bridegroom's Call*, that we *may enter in with him to the Marriage* without Delay; and let our Hearts and Hopes be fixed upon that Holy Place, where alone true Joys are to be found. Let us prefer the Honours of Heaven, for which God and Nature deſigned us, before all the falſe Luſtre of this World; that we may recover thoſe true Notions of Greatneſs, which our Firſt Father enjoyed in the State of his Innocence. Let us conſider what a bright glorious Day will ſucceed that gloomy Night in which we live at preſent, and paſſionately wiſh for that happy Hour, when this never-

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declining Day ſhall break upon us. Let this noble Hope add to the Warmth and Vigour of our Faith, and let us, by being Rich in good Works, lay up thoſe Treaſures in Heaven, which we ſhall find ſtick by us for ever, when Death ſhall ſnatch all our other Poſſeſſions away; And let us be content with the ſame Aſſurance of Salvation, which other Holy Men have enjoyed before us. An Aſſurance laid deep and ſtrong, built upon the Foundation of Modeſty and Holy Fear, a total Diſtruſt of our own Merits, and an humble Confidence in the Mercies of our good God.

For Thou, *O God*, alone art our Hope. Thou only canſt, and Thou wilt, heal all our Infirmities, bind up our Wounds, repair our Breaches, ſettle our wandring Souls, and ſtrengthen our feeble Wiſhes and Endeavours. O ſave us then from that threatning Tempeſt, which this boiſterous and troubleſome Life expoſes us to; Let that Almighty Voice, which ſaid to the Winds and Seas, *Be ſtill*, and *immediately there was a great Calm*; let that ſame Voice command our Paſſions down, and perfectly compoſe the Toſſings and Storms of our Souls. Let that invincible Arm, which brings Light out of Darkneſs, aſſiſt us in our Conflict, and help us to overcome that Charm, with which the Splendour of this World

World bewitches wretched Mortals. Scatter these Clouds, which intercept our sight, and hinder us from discerning our true Interest; speak in our Ears those Words of Life, which instruct ignorant Minds, and make them duly sensible, both of their present Misery, and that inestimable Bliss, promised and prepared for Them that Love and Fear Thee. Break the Bands that fasten us down to Earth and sensible Objects; exalt and refine our Desires from their Dross; Take away from us the Spirit of this World, and fill us with Thy Own. 'Tis true indeed, We have deserved nothing but Anger and Vengeance at the Hands of our God, because we have taken great and wicked Pains to defeat the good Intentions and Effects of all his former Mercies vouchsafed unto us. But do thou, *Blessed Lord*, convince us experimentally, that Thou art much more powerful to save, than We our selves can be to destroy: That thy Clemency can triumph over our Obstinacy, that thy Goodness can overcome thy Justice; and that the Salvation which is by no means due to any Actions of Ours, is yet the deserved Reward of thy meritorious Sufferings. Shed forth the Beams of that Heavenly Wisdom into our Hearts, which prepares Believers for the effectual Influences of thy Grace, and teaches them how to value

the Treaſures of a Future and a Spiritual Bliſs: Shew us the infinite Difference between an Immortal Crown, and the imperfect Satisfactions of a Moment; and enable us to deſpiſe all that is preſent and viſible, in compariſon of that which is inviſible and eternal.

And although we be miſerably great Sinners, yet let us not deſpair of Grace on the one Hand; or on the other be ſo inſenſible of our Wretchedneſs, that we ſhould ever ceaſe to cry unto thee with the moſt affectionate Sighs and Groans of ſorrowful and wounded Hearts, in the Style of thy ancient Prophets; *Save, Lord, and hear us*; *O Lord, ſhew thy Mercy upon us*, and *grant us thy Salvation.*

But after all, There is no other Way of coming to the Father, but by the Son. For He is the Mediator between God and Man; He only, (as the Prophet expreſſes it) is *the Hope of all the Ends of the Earth, and of them that remain in the Broad Sea*, (Pſal. lxv.) And, though we ſhould be ſo zealous and ſo ſucceſsful in our Endeavours, as to bring over all the World to the Ways of Truth and Righteouſneſs; yet even thus our Merits would not be a ſufficient Foundation of Confidence, but our only Truſt and Refuge muſt be ſtill in his great Mercies. *For there is no other Name*

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under Heaven given unto Men whereby they can be ſaved, but only the Name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, (Acts iv. 12.) He only can have a Property in our Salvation, becauſe that Salvation is entirely the Effect and Fruit of His Sufferings. Perfect then, O dear Redeemer, the Deſign thou haſt ſo graciouſly begun: Come thy own Self, and in much Compaſſion bring back this ſtray Sheep to thy own Fold; Deſtroy and root up in us our own Work, for that is the Work of Sin; but preſerve and finiſh Thine, for that is Goodneſs and Grace. And although we may have been ſo unhappy, as to forget that We were thy Creatures, yet be not thou provoked to lay aſide thy Bowels, or ever to forget that Thou art our God and only Saviour.

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